Dr. *CONANT's*

SERMONS

Preach'd on

Several Occasions.

IMPRIMATUR.

Geo. Royse, R.R^mo in Christo Patri ac Dom. Dom. *Johanni* Archiep. *Cant.* à Sacris Domest.

Mart. 14.
169$\frac{2}{3}$.

SERMONS

Preach'd on

Several Occasions.

By JOHN CONANT, D. D.

LONDON:

Printed for **Richard Chiswell**, and **Tho. Cockerill**; At the *Rose and Crown* in St. *Paul*'s Church-yard, and at the *Three Leggs* in the *Poultrey* over-against *Stocks-Market*. MDCXCIII.

TO THE

INHABITANTS

OF

NORTHAMPTON;

AND

More especially to those of the Parish of *All-Saints* there.

Christian Friends and Neighbours,

THough my great Age, and the Infirmities attending it, have lately constrained me to quit my relation to you, yet I still account my self obliged to endeavour to promote your spiritual

welfare what I may. In order whereunto, I here lay before you ſome few of thoſe plain and practical Sermons which I formerly preached unto you; hoping that they may take better effect, than when you heard them from the Pulpit; which that they may ſo do, is the unfeigned deſire and earneſt Prayer of

Your truly loving Friend

and Servant,

JOHN CONANT.

THE

THE PUBLISHER TO THE READER.

IT may be expected by thoſe that knew the Reverend Author of theſe Sermons, and the publick Station he was in for ſeveral years in the Univerſity of *Oxford*, as Divinity Profeſſor there, that he ſhould have gratified the World with another ſort of Work, I mean his Lectures which he there read, and were compoſed with great Learning, Accuracy and Judgment. But that it ſeems is not ſo agreeable to his native modeſty,

who chuſes rather to live and die in a kind of obſcurity, than be ſet *as a city upon an hill*; and values himſelf more upon the relation he had to a Parochial Cure, and the Capacity he was in of doing good to the Souls of men, than of being in one of the moſt publick Stations in the Church: And in which, ſince by the privation of his Sight, and other Infirmities of Age, he has been no longer able to ſerve, he thought, by publiſhing ſome Practical Diſcourſes preach'd in that Auditory, he might, though he be in a ſenſe dead, yet ſpeak, and be uſeful among them.

The Diſcourſes are ſuch as he uſually compoſed, plain and practical, and ſuited to the meaneſt Capacity.

And

And if there be any thing that is not of that nature (as there is very little) and which the Author, had he had the laſt peruſal, would have reviſed; the Error is to be imputed to the Publiſher, to whoſe care and choice they were committed.

The Diſcourſes ſometimes are large, and comprehend ſeveral Sermons, though under the title of one, but it was not well to be prevented; and which the Reader however may well diſpence with.

The Two laſt Sermons are Occaſional, but the occaſion ſuch as will render them profitable to all.

John Williams:

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AND this is the condemnation, That light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil.

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And when he was in affliction, he beſought the Lord his God, and humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers,

And prayed unto him, and he was intreated of him, and heard his ſupplication, and brought him again to Jeruſalem into his kingdom. Then Manaſſeh knew that the Lord he was God. pag. 257.

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Should we again break thy Commandments, and join in affinity with the people of theſe abominations? Wouldeſt not thou be angry with us till thou hadſt conſumed us, ſo that there ſhould be no remnant nor eſcaping.

SERMON XI.

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Thus ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth, and the ſea, and the dry land.

And I will ſhake all nations, and the deſire of all nations ſhall come, and I will fill this houſe with glory, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts.

The

The ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts.

The glory of this latter houſe ſhall be greater than of the former, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts: and in this place will I give peace, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts.

The

The First Sermon.

JOHN III. 19, 20.

And this is the condemnation, That light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil.

For every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.

I May take it for granted, That by light here, we are to underſtand the light of the Goſpel: And yet hereby Chriſt is not excluded, who is called τὸ φῶς, *the light*, in the ſeventh and eighth Verſes of the firſt Chapter of this Evangeliſt, and τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν, *the true light*, v. 9. Both theſe lights may well go together; Chriſt the Sun of

ouſneſs, and the Goſpel the Rayes which he ſends forth to enlighten the dark World.

Beſides, as Chriſt conveyeth to us the Goſpel, ſo the Goſpel conveyeth Chriſt unto us, and offers him unto the World; in both which reſpects it's called *the Goſpel of Chriſt*, Gal. 1. 7. he being, as the Author, ſo the principal ſubject of it. Now both theſe Lights are come into the World; Chriſt by his Incarnation, and together with him the Goſpel, *i. e.* a more full and clear diſcovery of the way of Salvation by Chriſt, than before.

Gal. 1. 7.

That the light in both ſenſes is come into the World, and finds no better reception; This is *The condemnation*, κρίσις, the judgment, according to the proper acception of the word; but here κρίσις for κατάκρισις, Judgment, for Condemnation, by an uſual Synechdoche, and ſo our Tranſlators have rendered it, looking rather at the ſenſe, than at the immediate propriety of the word. Again, This is *The condemnation*, that is, by a Metonymy, the cauſe of condemnation, that which deſerves, meritoriouſly procures and brings on condemnation.

nation, Laſtly, This is *The condemnation*, not ſolely and excluſively as to all other things, but in the ſenſe that ſhall be afterwards mentioned when I come to ſpeak to that particular.

The words of my Text (not to ſpend time in any unneceſſary Preface to what I have to ſay) we may conveniently reſolve into theſe four Propoſitions.

1. *That light is come into the world.*
2. That *men love darkneſs rather than light.*
3. That the reaſon why men love darkneſs rather than light, is, *becauſe their deeds are evil.*
4. That *this is the condemnation, that though light be come into the world, yet men love darkneſs rather than light.*

Paſſing by the three former, the laſt of theſe Propoſitions is that which I intend at preſent to inſiſt on, as being the chief thing intended in this portion of holy Scripture. Concerning the ſenſe of which Propoſition, a few words will be neceſſary to be premiſed, before I

proceed to lay down the grounds thereof. This is *The condemnation*, not solely, and exclusively as to all other things, as if nothing else could condemn a man, but signally and emphatically, ἡ κρίσις, the great meritorious cause of the severest punishment. I say, the rejection of the light of the Gospel, or not giving it due entertainment, is not the only thing that condemns men. For,

1. Those Heathens unto whom the light of the Scriptures never came, shall not therefore be exempted from punishment: The Apostle hath taught us, Rom. 2. 12. *That as many as have sinned without the law, shall also perish without the law.* Their sins against their natural light, and the Law of Nature written in their hearts, shall condemn them; there shall be no need of calling in the assistance of the Law externally promulged, and written in Tables of Stone; much less of the Gospel, to give evidence against them.

'Tis true, if the Gospel were never offered them, and they shut up under a moral impossibility of being acquainted with it, we cannot apprehend how their not believing should be charged upon

upon them as their ſin. *Aquinas* hath rightly ſtated this matter; *Si infidelitas ſumatur ſecundum negationem puram, ſicut in illis qui nihil audiverunt de fide, non habet rationem peccati:* pure negative infidelity, or a meer not believing in thoſe who never heard any thing of the Goſpel, hath not the nature of ſin. And this was likewiſe St. *Auſtin*'s judgment, as appears by the Expoſition he gives of the words of our Saviour, *John* 15. 22. *If I had not come unto them, they had had no ſin: Loquitur de peccato quo non crediderunt in Chriſtum,* Our Saviour ſpeaketh, ſaith he, *of the ſin of not believing in Chriſt.* Though they had been guilty of many other ſins, yet their not believing had not been imputed to them. And the reaſon hereof is evident, becauſe they had never a power in *Adam* of believing that which was never made known unto them; there being a ſimple incompoſſibility and repugnancy in the nature of the thing, that a man ſhould by faith aſſent to, and embrace that, which he was never in the leaſt acquainted with, which was never as much as propounded to him to be the object of his faith. *How ſhall we believe on him of whom we have not heard?* Rom. 10. 14.

2 2dæ Quæſt. 10. Artic. 1.

10. 14. 'Tis a question that cannot be answered. *Adam* himself, with all that strength which he received from God, could not have done it; and therefore neither can that be required of his Posterity, which he himself never received.

2. As for such as have the Gospel published to them, and finally persevere in unbelief, neither is their unbelief the only sin for which they are condemn'd. What sober man can think that one sin can expunge another? that mens unbelief should take off and extinguish the guilt of all their other sins, so as none of them should at all come under consideration, when Christ pronounceth the condemnatory Sentence? They who should entertain so wild a phansy, must have forgotten the form of the Proceedings at the last day, as Christ himself hath described it, *Matth.* 25. where express mention is made of other sins, as the ground of the Sentence to be then pronounced.

Yet I deny not but that in a limited sense, wicked men living under the light of the Gospel, may be said to be condemned only for their unbelief; because if they had believed, none of their other

other ſins ſhould have condemned them. But now, they not believing, the guilt of all their other ſins againſt the Law abideth on them; and beſides, there is an addition of further guilt by their great ſin againſt the Goſpel; and this their ſin againſt the Goſpel, is that which preſſeth them moſt heavily, and hath the ſoreſt influence upon the final Sentence for the inflaming and heightening of it.

So then, theſe things being thus premiſed, we have the ſenſe of the Propoſition before us. This is *The condemnation*, the matter and meritorious cauſe of the moſt ſore and dreadful condemnation, *that light being come into the world*, the Goſpel being publiſhed, and Chriſt in the Goſpel being tendered to the Sons of men, they ſlight and refuſe this light, preferring darkneſs before it, and chuſing rather to continue in their ſins, though it coſt them dear, than to embrace Chriſt to their everlaſting bliſs and happineſs.

Now the grounds of the Propoſition, together with the equity of that ſeverity which it imports, will further appear unto us, if we take into conſideration theſe enſuing particulars.

1. 'Tis light that is refuſed, and refuſed with an affront put upon it, darkneſs being preferred before it. Now in this alone there are ſeveral things which do not a little aggravate a man's ſin, and by conſequence, heighten his puniſhment.

1. When a man goes on againſt light, there is more of the formality of ſin, than where light is wanting: There is a direct and plain oppoſition againſt the Rule, an intentional ἀνομία, or irregularity: whereas, in caſe of ignorance, the Rule indeed was violated materially, but not formally and wittingly as ſuch. Our Saviour lays much ſtreſs upon this for the greatning of a man's
Joh. 9. 41. ſin. *If ye were blind, ye ſhould have no ſin*; that is, none in compariſon of what now you have. And to the ſame effect is that of St. *James*,
Ch. 4. 17. *To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is ſin*; that is, ſin to the purpoſe, ſin of no ordinary complexion.

2. What is done againſt light, hath not only an inconformity to the Rule, but ſome degree of contempt thereof. Wherefore in ſuch caſes God looks upon

on himself as despised. *Why hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord?* said he to *David*, when he had knowingly and deliberately sinned, 2 *Sam.* 12. 9.

3. It argues Corruption to have gotten head, and to have grown up to a great measure of strength and maturity; it argues such a person to be set upon sin, and wholly bent to gratify himself therein, whatsoever shall come of it. When the light it self shall stand in a man's way, and flash in his face, and yet he will go on, he acts as one so resolved to sin, as nothing shall take him off. This, in the language of the Scipture, is to sin presumptuously, by which a man under the Law was judged to have *reproached the Lord*; in regard whereof, no less punishment was appointed than the utter cutting him off from among his people, *Numb.* 15. 30, 31.

And thus far I have only insisted on the consideration of light more generally: 'Tis light that is refused and contemned; and therefore neither the sin, nor the punishment of the person so offending, can be small.

2. 'Tis

2. 'Tis not any kind of light, but Gospel light, that is so ill treated; and this hath yet much more in it, than all that hath been hitherto mentioned.

1. The light of the Gospel is a clearer light. All other light is but darkness to this. The Heathens had the light of Nature for their guide; but yet they were still in darkness till the Gospel enlightened them; for the very Errand of the Gospel to them was, to open their eyes, *and to turn them from darkness to light.* The *Jews* under the dispensations of the Law, had much more light; and yet were heavenly things in great part so vail'd and wrapt up in Types and Shadows, as their condition to that of Gospel-times seems to have been but as the morning spread upon the Mountains, to the noon-day-light.

Acts 26. 18.

2. 'Tis a light that presents to our view the most excellent and most desirable things. *Pardon of sin*, Acts 10. 43. *Peace with God*, Rom. 5. 1. *Eternal life*, John 3. 36. *A kingdom that cannot be shaken*, Heb. 12. 28. *An inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away*, 1 Pet. 1. 4. *Such things as neither eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard,*

heard, nor have entred into the heart of man to conceive, 1 Cor. 2. 9.

3. These excellent things which the light of the Gospel sets before us, are such as were by infinite Wisdom and unspeakable Love designed and contrived for us before the foundations of the World were laid. The most wise and gracious God did in nothing more discover the unsearchable Treasures of his Wisdom, and the Riches of his Grace, than in the Contrivance of our Salvation in such a way, as in which Mercy and Justice so admirably meet together, and Righteousness and Peace kiss each other. We cannot therefore refuse or slight these excellent things, without a manifest disparagement of the Wisdom and Love of God; as if neither the one, nor the other, were considerable herein; and as if after all that God hath done, the things so wisely designed, and graciously proffer'd, were not worth our acceptance.

4. The Gospel presseth the entertainment of these excellent things with the most cogent and forcible Arguments. 'Tis not laid before us as a matter of indifferency, whether we will embrace what's tendered, or refuse it. We

are

are told and assured, that as the acceptance of the things proffered will render us unspeakably blessed and happy to eternity, so the refusal of them will certainly make us everlastingly and unconceivably miserable. *He that believeth, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned*, Mark 16. 16.

5. Besides the external tender of these things in the Gospel, the Spirit of God usually more or less accompanies the outward Ministration of the Gospel, inwardly working together with it, treating with us, and soliciting the matters of our peace by Enlightnings and Convictions, by stirring up good Motions and Affections, Purposes and Resolutions, which makes our refusal of mercy after all this, much more worthy of the severest punishment.

6. Add to all this, the consideration of the greatness of the Person who at first published the Gospel, and made tender of those excellent things to the World himself, while here on Earth; and also still continues to do it by his Servants. The Lord of Life and Glory, the Eternal Son of God, who is over all, God blessed for ever, came in person from Heaven

Heaven out of the Boſome of his Father, on this very Errand, that he might *make reconciliation for ſin, and bring in everlaſting righteouſneſs.* And offer the fruits and benefit of all to Mankind, making this general Proclamation, *Whoſoever believeth ſhall be ſaved.* Dan. 9. 24.

If but an Earthly Prince ſhould ſend his only Son to the remoteſt Parts of his Dominions, on purpoſe to make tender of ſome great thing to one of his meaneſt Subjects, what an indignity, and how intolerable an affront would it be, if that his tender ſhould be ſlighted! But here the King Eternal ſends his only Son from Heaven to offer us Everlaſting Life, and we entertain him no otherwiſe, than as if he came in a needleſs Embaſſy; for ſo much our moſt unworthy carriage towards him imports, if we do not accept of his Tenders. This the Scripture inſiſts on as a circumſtance that carries in it no ſmall aggravation of the ſin of our unbelief. *If the word ſpoken by Angels was ſtedfaſt, and every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience received a juſt recompence of reward; how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation, which at firſt began to be ſpoken to us by the*

Heb. 2. 2, 3. Heb. 12. 25. *the Lord!* And again, *If they escaped not who refused him who spake from earth; much more shall not we escape, if we refuse him who speaketh from heaven.*

Now put all these things together, and I see not how you can chuse but conclude, That as there is no sin like that which is committed against the light of the Gospel, so there is no punishment like unto that which will be inflicted for this sin: or, That *this is the condemnation, That light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light.* And so I proceed to the application of what hath been spoken.

USE I.

First then, To speak to the more dissolute Professors of the Christian Religion; From the Premises we may infer, That 'tis a most vain and empty Plea which many loose Christians think to help themselves with at the day of their account to God. They have had their birth and education where the light of the Gospel shines; and under the influences of that light they have lived. As soon as they came into the World,

World, they were in Baptiſm dedicated to Chriſt; in that Ordinance they gave their Names to Chriſt, and liſted themſelves among his Followers and Soldiers; and they never afterwards renounced him, but made profeſſion of him all their days. What reaſon therefore have they to make any queſtion but that Chriſt will own them? They have not been Heathens or Mahumetans: Wherefore, though Chriſt ſhould turn thoſe wretched Infidels into Hell by thouſands; yet as for themſelves, being Chriſtians, they hope they may well expect more favour from him. Should he deal with them as with Heathens? as with thoſe who never wore his Livery? who never made profeſſion of him? who never knew him, or heard of his Name? This were hard meaſure, and ſuch as they think they need not fear at the hands of ſo merciful a Saviour. Who ſhould go to Heaven, if not ſuch as themſelves? whom ſhould Chriſt ſave, if not Chriſtians? Alas poor Souls! You think to plead as thoſe who make account that Chriſt is much beholding to you for vouchſafing to be called by his Name. But foraſmuch as profeſſing to know Chriſt, in your Works

Works you deny him; forasmuch as while you call him your Saviour, you refuse to be ruled by him as your Lord; forasmuch as notwithstanding all the love you pretend to have for him, and his Gospel, your Actions are such as proclaim you to be those who love darkness rather than light, and who hate true Christianity, the reality and power of that which you make profession of; had not Christ been more beholding to you, if you had never so much as in external profession owned him? If you had never been called by that blessed Name, which by your unholy lives you have reproached and profaned? Many Heathens were never in a capacity of dishonouring that Name, as having never had the knowledge of it; and your knowledge of Christ hath been of no other advantage to you, than only to enable you knowingly to slight him, and trample his precious Blood under your feet. Thus you throw dirt in you Saviour's face, while you would seem to honour him. *Quid est aliud sanctum vocabulum sine merito quàm ornamentum in luto*, saith *Salvian*, in his 4th Book *de Gubernatione Dei*; The sacred Name of Christian without faith

and

and holiness, what is it but an Ornament trodden under foot in the mire, or a precious Jewel which you have taken and drawn along the Kennel? But you debaucht and vicious Persons, you wild Ranters, rather than sober Christians, speak out your inmost thoughts: Do you really make account of claiming special interest in Christ? and do you in earnest expect to be owned by him? With what face can you do it, while you continue to be as you are? *Cæsar* being at a Banquet, where he was but meanly entertained, and no way so as was suitable to the dignity of so great a Person; when the entertainment was over, instead of thanking him who had invited him, he only gave him this check in his ear, *Non putabam me tibi tam familiarem; I had not thought that we two had been so familiar.* And will not Christ thank you much in the like manner, for having been called by his Name, and for reckoning your self among those that belong to him, and have a special interest in him? Do you not know how he will at the last day entertain you, and in what manner he will declare the sense he hath of your kindness? Thou lewd and profligate

Perſon, who calleſt me Lord, who numbreſt thy ſelf among my Diſciples, and the moſt intimate of my Retinue; how long have we been ſo well acquainted? Thou common Swearer, thou intemperate and unclean Perſon, thou ſcoffer at Religion, thou nominal Chriſtian, but real Enemy to the Goſpel, and all that ſincerely profeſs it; how durſt thou make mention of my Name, *and take my covenant in thy mouth, ſeeing thou hateſt to be reformed, and caſteſt my words behind thy back?* Be it known unto thee, thou haſt been much miſtaken in me, I own no ſuch Friends or Followers as thou art; *Depart from me thou worker of iniquity, I know thee not.* Oh moſt ſad and terrible Diſappointment! when you ſhall be thus condemned, and turned into Hell by him from whom all your Expectations of Salvation were! But yet this is not all; you ſhall not only be adjudged to Hell with the Heathen that know not God, and all the Families that call not on his Name; but you ſhall be more ſeverely handled in that place of Torment, than the very Heathens. The Condition of a ſober and temperate Heathen ſhall then be more tolerable, than

than that of a lewd and vicious Chriſtian. And is it not a moſt righteous thing with God that it ſhould be ſo? The Pagan World never had the light that you have been bleſt with: Pagans never had thoſe many gracious Calls and Invitations to Faith and Repentance which you have had: Pagans never had the tenders of thoſe glorious things which have in the Goſpel been proffer'd you: The Terrors of the Law, and the torments prepared in Hell for all the people of the World that forget God, were never laid open, and ſet before their eyes, as they have been before yours: Pagans never had experience of thoſe ſtrong Convictions, of thoſe inward Motions and Strivings of the Spirit of God with their Souls, which you have had: And yet after all this, you are in many reſpects much worſe than many Heathens. And will you ſtill think to plead, We are Chriſtians, and ſhould Chriſt deal with us as with Heathens? I tell you once more, no; he will not deal with you as with Heathens: As the Aggravations of your Sins have been incomparably greater, ſo ſhall your Puniſhment be; *It ſhall be more tolerable in* Matth. 11. 22, 23, 24.

the day of judgment for heathens, than for you.

USE 2.

In the second place, I shall speak unto those who know much, and are still in the pursuit of more knowledge, but make little conscience of practising what they know.

From what hath been delivered, we may also infer, how much it concerns these, to add conscientious practise to their knowledge, and to endeavour that all their Gifts may be seasoned with grace. The more knowledge any graceless Person hath, the greater without repentance will his future Torments be, and the more intolerable his misery. You whose Spirits are with much fervour and intention carried out after knowledge, and yet possibly so much slight and undervalue Grace, as that you grudge to spend one hour in a serious enquiry into your spiritual Estate; I beseech you consider what you are a-doing: While you are adding Notion to Notion, and Conclusion to Conclusion, you are but heaping up matter for your more just and heavy Condemnation; you are but preparing

ring Whips for your own backs. *For he that knows his masters will, and doth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.* Luke. 12. 47. One stripe the more for every beam of light which was not improved to the ends for which it was afforded. I speak not this to disparage knowledge, which is an excellent gift of God, and a principal part of his Image in man; much less to dishearten any in their pursuit of it; but to provoke them to a joint endeavour after grace and knowledge, according to the Apostle's Exhortation, 2 *Pet.* 3. 18. It was said of *Galba*, who had a fine Wit, but a deformed Body, *Ingenium Galbæ malè habitat, Galba's good Wit hath but an ill habitation.* The same may I say of excellent Gifts in a corrupt mind; 'Tis a thousand pities that so noble a Guest should have no better Lodgings. Get your Soul adorned with grace, and then it will be fitter to entertain Gifts. And to press this a little more upon you, let me leave with you only these three Considerations.

1. If Knowledge be excellent and desirable, Grace is much more excellent, and much more worthy to be the

Object of our most raised desires. After the Apostle had been discoursing of those extraordinary and miraculous Gifts, which in the Primitive times God was pleased to pour out upon Believers, he makes way to his following Discourse of love and grace by this commendatory Preface; *Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.* You are digging and searching after Knowledge, as after hid Treasure; and why not then much more after Grace, which is the most precious and invaluable Treasure, the only true Riches? *This ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone*; as our Saviour speaks in another case. Yea, this ye ought much rather to have done, in comparison whereof your pursuit of knowledge is but as *the tything of mint and cummin, compared with the most weighty matters of the law.*

1 Cor. 12. 31.

Luke 16. 11.

Matth. 23. 23.

2. The more Knowledge you have, the more Grace you need. A little Grace will not suffice you to manage a large stock of Knowledge. Your Knowledge is one of your chiefest Talents for which you must be accountable; and 'tis impossible you should so imploy it, as to be able to give a comfortable account thereof without a proportionable

portionable measure of Grace. The higher any man is lifted up in parts and gifts, the more is he exposed to the violent assaults of manifold Temptations; Temptations to Pride, Self-confidence, overvaluing of himself, contempt of others, wicked abuse of his knowledge and parts to the service of *Satan*, and the disservice of God, and his Church: And therefore no man hath more need of grace, of a plentiful measure of grace, than he that is most accomplisht with knowledge. Ὅσῳ πλείονος καταξιώθημεν γνώσεως, τοσούτῳ μᾶλλον ὑποκείμεθα κινδύνῳ, *The more knowledge we have, the greater is our danger*, saith *Clem. Alex.* in the 4th Book of his *Stromates.*

3. Unless you have grace together with your knowledge, the time will come, when you shall wish that you had been as ignorant, as you are graceless. *Quàm nescirem literas! How could I wish that I had never learnt to write or read*, was the mild and compassionate Speech of an Emperor, when he was desired to set his Hand for the Execution of a Malefactor. What he said out of a tender and merciful regard to the Life of another man, that shall the

graceleſs and finally impenitent knowing man one day ſay, out of the anguiſh and horror of his own Soul; *Vtinam neſciſſem literas!* Oh that I had never known my Letters, and that my Parents had never ſet me to School. Oh that I had been confined all my days to ſome poor Cottage, or dark Corner, where I might ſcarce have known my right Hand from my left: that I had been the moſt ſilly, ignorant, contemptible Creature in the World, a meer Idiot, or natural Fool, rather than by my ſins againſt ſo much knowledge, to have procured to my ſelf this direful acceſs to my Torments. You may have heard of a poor Idiot, who having never uttered one ſerious word before, was heard to utter this ſhort and pertinent Petition, when he was going out of the World, *Lord, require no more of me than thou haſt given me.* The ungodly knowing man, the profane Wit, the learned Atheiſt, will have his mouth ſtopt; he will not be able to find ſo good a Plea for himſelf, as that poor Idiot had. He hath received much from the hand of God, and much ſhall be required of him. And ſo I go on to what followeth in the 20th Verſe.

Every

PART II.

Verſe 20. *Every one that doth evil hateth the light.*

THE words are a Propoſition ſo clearly and plainly expreſt, that to endeavour to make it plainer were but to loſe time. Seeing therefore I cannot expreſs it in clearer terms, nor caſt it into a better form, I ſhall even take it as it lyes, and ſo handle it; *Every one that doth evil hateth the light.* The Truth of which Propoſition I know not how I can better demonſtrate, than by ſhewing what influence the light hath upon men in reference to ſin; and withal, how men ſtand affected towards their ſin.

1. The light, (I mean principally the light of the Goſpel, of which our Saviour here ſpeaks) diſcovers ſin. There is a threefold light which diſcovers ſin; the light of Nature, the light of the Law, and the light of the Goſpel.

(1.) The very light of Nature doth in ſome meaſure diſcover ſin. The *Gentiles*

Rom. 2. 14, 15. *Gentiles who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, their consciences in the mean while accusing or excusing them,* according as their actions are more or less conformable to the dictates of the light of nature in them. This light was full and perfect, as it was at first set up in man by his Creator; but is by the fall now become weak and imperfect, so that in many things it leaves a man at a great loss. That first light represented things to man exactly according to their nature, so as by the help of it he could clearly and perfectly discern between good and evil; but now that Primitive light being in great part extinguished, the weak remainders of it represent good and evil in a dark and obscure manner, so as by this light alone a man sees many times little Mar. 8. 24. better than he who saw Men as Trees; yea worse a great deal, taking good for evil, and evil for good; light for Isa. 5. 20. darkness, and darkness for light, as the Prophet speaks.

(2.) The light of the Law of God written, goes further in the discovery of sin, in which respect the Apostle Rom. 3. 20. ascribes the knowledge of sin to the Law. The Law exceeds the light of Nature as

as to the discovery of sin, in a double respect.

1. The Law discovers more sins than the meer light of Nature could. *I had not known sin*, saith the Apostle, *unless the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.* He had not known the sinfulness of the inward motions to sin, at least such of them as go before the consent of the will; the *motus primo primi*, as the Schools call them. Rom. 7. 7.

2. The Law makes a more full and clear discovery of those very sins which were in some measure known by the light of Nature.

(3.) The light of the Gospel goes yet further in the discovery of sin, and in some respects as much exceeds the Law herein, as the Law doth the light of Nature. For,

1. The light of the Gospel, as 'tis far greater and clearer, so 'tis of a more piercing and penetrating nature to find out and discover sin, as the Noon-day light looks into many a dark corner, and expoſeth those things to our view which before could not be discerned.

2. Gospel

2. Goſpel Adminiſtrations are accompanied with a more full Effuſion of the Spirit than was ordinarily under the Law. Now one ſpecial part of the
John 16.8. Spirits work being to convince of ſin, we may well conclude that the Spirit's Diſcovery and Convictions of ſin under the Goſpel are more full and effectual.

3. The Goſpel furniſheth us with ſeveral Glaſſes in which we may behold ſin repreſented to us in a more lively manner than by the Law alone; and this, whether we conſider the filthineſs or the heinouſneſs of ſin. Theſe Glaſſes are the Holineſs, and the Juſtice of God.

1. The Holineſs of God is ſo diſplayed and ſet forth in the Doctrine of the Goſpel, and in the Life of Chriſt, as never before. Hence it is that the Scripture ſeems ſo to ſpeak of this matter, as if God were little known until Chriſt by his Heavenly Doctrine and Holy Converſation revealed him. *No*
John 1.18. *man hath ſeen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the boſom of*
John 12. *the Father, he hath declared him. He*
45, 46. *that ſeeth me, ſeeth him that ſent me; I*

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am come as a light into the world, that whoſoever believeth in me, ſhould not abide in darkneſs. No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whomſoever the Son will reveal him. And the Apoſtle diſcourſing of the Glory and Excellency of the Evangelical Adminiſtration beyond the Legal, ſaith, That whereas they of old had a vail upon their Hearts, and ſaw things but darkly, *we all with open face as in a glaſs behold the glory of God* in the Face of Jeſus Chriſt. And that he there chiefly intends the Glory of his Holineſs, we may collect from what followeth; and we *are changed*, ſaith he, *into the ſame image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.* Now contraries affording mutual light to one another, the more we diſcern of the Holineſs of God, the more filthy and loathſome will ſin appear to us. This we ſee exemplified in the Prophet *Iſaiah*, who when he had ſeen the Lord ſitting upon his Throne, and heard his Holineſs proclaimed by one of the Seraphims, crying, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hoſts, the whole earth is full of his glory*; in the ſenſe of his ſinfulneſs, he cries out, *Wo is me, for I am undone, becauſe I am a man of unclean lips.*

Mat. 11. 27

2 Cor. 3. 18.

Iſa. 6. 3, 5.

2. Ano-

2. Another Glaſs to behold ſin in, is the Juſtice and Severity of God againſt ſin. As the Holineſs of God ſhews us the filthineſs of ſin, ſo doth his Juſtice and Severity ſhew us the Heinouſneſs and abominable nature of it. But now the Juſtice and Severity of God againſt ſin was never ſo much diſcovered by all the dreadful Threatnings of the Law, and terrible Judgments that have been inflicted upon Sinners ever ſince the Fall of *Adam* to this day, nor will ever be ſo much diſcovered by all the Sufferings of Millions in Hell to Eternity, as by what God for our ſins hath laid upon his own Eternal and moſt dearly beloved Son, who is over all God bleſſed for ever. The reaſon hereof is manifeſt and undeniable; for the Creature will never be able fully to ſatisfie the Juſtice of God by its endleſs Sufferings in Hell; if it could, why might it not be releaſed, and let out of Priſon? But Chriſt hath made full ſatisfaction to his Father's Juſtice; ſo that we have in that ſatisfaction which he hath preſented to his Father, in that ſatisfaction of infinite value, and in that alone, an exact and adequate meaſure by which we may take the full dimenſions of the heinouſ-

heinouſneſs of Man's ſin. Indeed what higher thing is imaginable by which we might be led to the ſight of the heinouſneſs of ſin, than that unparallel'd ſeverity of the moſt Righteous Judge of all the Earth againſt it, which induced him to lay ſuch a weight of puniſhment upon his only begotten Son, who is of the ſame Divine Eſſence with himſelf, when having taken our Nature on him, he undertook to bear what was due to us for our ſins. By what hath been ſaid, we ſee that the Goſpel not only diſcovers ſin, but alſo doth it in a very ſignal way, making ſuch lively repreſentations of the filthineſs and heinouſneſs thereof, as neither the light of Nature, nor the Law of God; nor all the dreadful Examples of God's Juſtice and Severity that ever have been, or ever ſhall be, can make.

Let us now in the next place add hereunto, That men are naturally moſt unwilling to ſee their ſins, and to be convinced of them; and then it may be preſumed we will eaſily grant, that the light muſt in that reſpect be very unacceptable to them. Such is every man's natural Pride and Self-love, that he hath no mind to know how bad he is. He

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is willing, if it be possible, to shut his Eyes against his own deformities, that he may be able to hold up a good Opinion of himself. Besides, as men desire not to know too much of their own defects, so they would not have them known to others. Seeing therefore the same light that discovers them to themselves, doth also lay them open to others; it is a thing not at all strange, that men, as long as they are wicked, and indulge themselves in sin, should be no great Friends to the light. It concerns those who have bad Wares, to get them into dark Shops, which may not discover the faultiness of them. And so much of that first thing, The light, especially that of the Gospel, makes discovery of mens sin, and that is it which they cannot endure.

2. The light of the Gospel doth not only discover mens sin, but calls upon them to leave it. *Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand,* was the substance of his Preaching who prepared the way for Christ, and ushered in Evangelical light Though God never in the least approved of sin, yet in former Ages before the coming of his Son into the World, he much winked at it, at least

Mat. 3. 2.

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in the *Gentile* World; but now he commandeth all men every where to repent. He lets the World know, that in times of Goſpel-light men muſt not expect that patience and forbearance at his hands, which he was pleaſed to exerciſe towards thoſe who lived in darker Ages, and times of Ignorance. Barren Trees might long ſtand before, *but now the Ax is laid to the root of the tree, and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, ſhall be hewen down, and caſt into the fire.* The main Errand and Deſign of the Goſpel is, that men be *turned from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* To this purpoſe is that of the Apoſtle, *The night is far ſpent, the day is at hand; let us therefore caſt off the works of darkneſs, and put on the armour of light; let us walk honeſtly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenneſs, not in chambering and wantonneſs, not in ſtrife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and make no proviſion for the fleſh to fulfil the luſts thereof.* And again, *The grace of God that bringeth ſalvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent*

Acts 16. 30.

Mat 3.10.

Acts 26. 18.

Rom. 13. 12, 13, 14.

Tit. 2. 11, 12.

2 Tim. 2 19. *ſent world. And let every one that nameth the name of Chriſt, depart from iniquity.* But this is that which the corrupt Heart of man can leaſt of all endure. Men are unwilling to ſee their ſins, but much more unwilling to forſake them. Whence elſe are thoſe excuſes which many frame when they are invited to come unto Chriſt? One is ingaged in this buſineſs, and it muſt be diſpatched; he muſt be diſpenſed with till it be over. Another is inga-

Luke 14. 18, 19, 20. ged in that Affair, and he is not at leiſure. Whence elſe are thoſe downright

Joh. 5. 40. and peremptory Refuſals? *Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.* Yea, you would not be gained and prevailed with to come by the largeſt Proffers, by the moſt rich and excellent Promiſes. The greateſt Love and Tenderneſs, the moſt Compaſſionate Solicitations and Importunities, are not able to overcome them into a willingneſs; what to do? To be undone? No, to be made for ever; to be gathered under the Wings of Chriſt's moſt tender Care and Love, that they might be everlaſtingly Happy in the Fruition of him. That ſin is the cauſe of this peremptory refuſal, cannot be denied; for nothing but

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ſin could ſo bewitch and tranſport them, that they ſhould with ſo much obſtinacy ſtand in their own light, wilfully thruſt away from themſelves Everlaſting Life, and forſake their own Mercies. 'Tis agreed on, that all men naturally deſire happineſs; 'tis Nature's Language, *Who will ſhew us any good?* Pſal. 4. 6. Could men therefore reject Eternal Happineſs and Glory upon any other Conſideration, than that the Terms on which 'tis offered ſeem to be too hard? They muſt part with their ſins if they will be happy; and O how hard a ſaying is this to Fleſh and Blood! The Friendſhip which is between the heart of man and ſin, being ſo ſtrict and entire, can that light of the Goſpel be welcome to him whoſe Errand from Heaven is to make an everlaſting ſeparation between him and his ſins? Moſt clear it is, that wicked men, while ſuch, cannot abide the light; and that however they may endeavour to cover over their Enmity againſt it with other pretenſions, yet the true reaſon why they hate it, is the wickedneſs of their hearts and lives; they therefore hate it becauſe their deeds are evil, as our Saviour gives us an account of the ground of their hatred thereof.

But it may here be objected, That the Holy Scriptures elsewhere seem to give other reasons of mens not entertaining the light of the Gospel. Sometimes they seem to impute it to the sublimity, and to the mysterious Nature of the great Truths contained in the Gospel. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* Sometimes the Scriptures impute it to the subtilty and malice of Satan darkening the minds of men. *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them.* And lastly, otherwhile the Scriptures speak of God's concealing the Mysteries of the Gospel from some men; so our Saviour speaking to his Father, saith, *Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent.* There being also these other reasons of mens not embracing the light of the Gospel, how is it that our Saviour seems to lay the whole stress of this matter upon this, that mens deeds are evil? To this I answer,

1 Cor. 2. 14.

2 Cor. 4. 3, 4.

Mat. 11. 25

1. That

1. That it is not neceſſary that we ſhould ſo underſtand our Saviour, as if he intended to make man's ſin the ſole or only cauſe why he hates the light, but one principal cauſe. And that 'tis a principal cauſe thereof, hath already appeared from what hath been ſpoken, and will yet more fully appear by what ſhall be further ſpoken in anſwer to the Objections. Wherefore,

2. Though there may be ſome other cauſes of mens hating the light, and preferring darkneſs before it; yet they may for the moſt part be ſome way or other reſolved into this which our Saviour here mentioneth. Other things may concur ſometimes, but there is ſcarce any thing that hath ſo general and almoſt ſo perpetual an influence upon mens hating, declining, running away from, oppoſing, and rejecting the light, as mans ſin. That moſtly all other cauſes may be reſolved into this, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, in anſwer to the forementioned Objections.

As to the firſt of them, 'tis moſt true, that in Spiritual things there is a great diſproportion between the Intellective Faculty as now 'tis ſince the Fall, and the

Object. The Mysteries of the Gospel are high and sublime; our understanding is dark, weak, and shallow. But,

1. Whence came this disproportion? Was it not very much from the sin of man at first, who put out his own Eyes, wounded his Intellectuals, and weakened his natural Powers? It cannot be denied but that *Adam* in the state of Innocency and Integrity, though he could not have found out those deep Mysteries of the Gospel concerning our Redemption by Christ, and the things relating thereunto, they being things that have no natural cause from whence the highest created reason might deduce or collect them; and many of them being things above Nature, and such as depend meerly upon the good pleasure of God unknown to us, until by himself revealed; I say, though *Adam* could not by the strength of his Reason and Natural Abilities have found out these deep things, yet it cannot be denied but that if these things had been propounded to *Adam* to be assented to, and believed upon the Authority of God revealing them, he both could and would most readily have assented to them, because

cauſe he had both a power and a readineſs of mind to believe whatſoever truth God ſhould reveal. And this is all that in theſe matters God requires of us. The deep things of the Goſpel are not propounded to us to be perfectly underſtood and comprehended by us; but they being unfathomable by the longeſt Line of our Reaſon; all that God expects from us, is, that we give our aſſent to them, and believe them; and this only becauſe he who can neither be deceived nor deceive, hath revealed them. But as the caſe now ſtands with us ſince the Fall, though theſe things are moſt clearly revealed, and as ſuch propounded to us, yet we will not believe them, they are fooliſhneſs to us, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks. So miſerably are our Minds taken up and prepoſſeſſed with a proud and fond Opinion of our ſelves, of our own natural Ability to judge of theſe things, with falſe Principles, with inveterate Prejudices, and rank Enmity againſt the Truth, and what not? that we ſhut out the light, and forbid it entertainment with us.

2. Add hereunto, that the perverſeneſs and ſtubbornneſs of the Will, the

irregularity, the inordinate propensions, and impetuous motions of the Affections and sensual Appetite, do not a little hinder the reception of Spiritual Truths into the Understanding. For as bad Meats, as crude and inconcocted Humours in the Stomach, send up noisom Vapours into the Head, clouding the Mind, discomposing the Brain, and disturbing the Fancy; so the sinful Distempers, the inordinate Passions, the unruly and rebellious disorders of the inferior Faculties, send up such fumes into the higher Region of the Soul, as darken the Understanding, as incline and dispose the Mind to embrace what is most sutable to the corrupt bent of the Will and Affections, and to reject the contrary. *Aristotle*'s censure of young Men as incompetent Auditors of the Precepts of Moral Philosophy, hath more reason in it than at first appears. The strength of their Lusts and Passions doth not only make them unwilling to come under the severity of Moral Precepts in their Practice and Conversation, but likewise much obstruct the passage of those severer Truths into their Understandings. 'Tis no easie matter to gain the assent of the Understanding

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to those practical Truths which a man hath no mind to be ordered by. Men will be very ingenious to invent, and very facil and easie to be prevailed with to entertain reasons against that, which, in respect of the contrary byas of their Wills, they would not have to be truth. As 'tis most true on the one side, *Quod nimis miseri volumus, hoc facile credimus. A weak and dark Argument shall have strength and evidence enough to perswade us of the truth of that which we have a mind to believe:* So on the other side, the most clear and demonstrative Arguments in the World shall not easily perswade us, where we are unwilling to be perswaded.

Neither is it thus only in matters of Morality, but much more in spiritual things, as the corrupt Heart of man is naturally at a far greater remoteness and distance from them. Upon this ground it seems to be that *Solomon*, who could best speak to that Argument, tells us, *That the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* When a man's heart is seasoned with the fear of God, and in some measure purged from corrupt Affections; when 'tis subdued unto God, and Prov. 1. 7.

and made yielding and pliable to his Will, then is a man fit to receive the Law from his mouth, and then is the Heart a meet Veſſel to receive the rich and invaluable treaſure of heavenly Wiſdom. And ſo much in anſwer to the firſt Objection.

I go on to the ſecond, That our not entertaining the light, ſeems to be put upon *Satan*'s ſcore. And here, though *Satan*'s malice and guilt be nothing the leſs, 'tis apparent that this cauſe may alſo in great part be reſolved into man's ſin and wickedneſs. How comes it to paſs, that *Satan* hath ſuch advantage againſt man in this matter? whence is it that he can ſo eaſily befool men, prejudice them againſt the light of the Goſpel, keep them in darkneſs, and lead them blindfold to Hell, as the Prophet led the Army of the *Syrians* into *Samaria?* Is it not becauſe he finds them preingaged in ſinful Courſes, from which they cannot endure to be taken off? Is it not becauſe he finds them reſolved to comply with their Luſts, and corrupt Affections, the gratifying of which is not to be gainſayed, they cannot bear it? were it not that he finds in mens hearts ſuch fit matter to work upon,

on, laid in before, and prepared to his hands, he could not ſo eaſily delude and blind them to their ruine. *Satan* had as much malice againſt Chriſt, and did with the greateſt rage and violence aſſault him, and endeavour to break in upon him: but he could not do it, as finding nothing within to bid him welcome. *The Prince of this world cometh,* Joh. 14. 31. ſaith he, *and findeth nothing in me. Nihil ſui operis ſuique veſtigii,* ſaith St. *Hierom,* in his Epiſtle to *Algaſia*; nothing of his own Work, no impreſſions which he himſelf hath made, no footſteps which he himſelf hath left behind him; nothing at all on which to ground an Accuſation, or to faſten a Temptation. The words may comprehend both, tho indeed the former ſeems to be in that place chiefly intended. Let *Satan* come to any of us when he will, he is ſure to find ſomething of his own, ſomething of his own work, ſomething of his own image which he hath ſtampt upon us, ſomething that he may lay claim to as his, ſomething of his party that will own him, and ſide with him. Hence the different iſſue of Chriſt's Temptations and ours. When *Satan* came to aſſault him, he found his Soul as an impregnable

pregnable Caſtle, well fortified on every quarter: clear and heavenly light without any mixture of darkneſs in the Underſtanding, perfect holineſs in the Will, exact regularity and compoſedneſs in the Affections; all of one accord within, to make reſiſtance, ſo as it was impoſſible for him to get poſſeſſion. When he comes to us, he finds the Soul as a *city that is broken down, and without walls*, as *Solomon* ſpeaks. And he finds a treacherous party within, that is ready to invite him, that would gladly ſet open the Gates to him, and betray all into his hands, were the Soul otherwiſe never ſo well fortified. And thus we ſee how far all the miſchief that *Satan* doth us, may be reſolved into our own ſin. 'Tis true, he blinds us, but 'tis becauſe we have no mind to ſee; he cloſeth our eyes againſt the light of the Goſpel, but he finds us endeavouring to cloſe our own eyes, and glad of any aſſiſtance from him to do it more effectually. In a word, he ſhuts out the light, that it ſhine not in upon us to our conviction, humiliation and converſion, but he makes him ſhuttings to do it, of our own darkneſs, prejudices, falſe Principles, and corrupt Affections.

Prov. 25. 28.

I now

I now proceed to the third Objection taken from *Matth.* 11. 25. where God himſelf is ſaid to hide the Myſteries of his Goſpel from the wiſe and prudent. Before I ſay any thing to this Objection, I muſt premiſe, That God in this matter (as in other things) hath a Prerogative which he makes uſe of, and according to which he acts, where, and when he ſees good. He being the Supream Lord of Heaven and Earth, as our Saviour ſtyles him in the place whence this Objection is taken, may diſpoſe of the knowledge of the Myſteries of his Kingdom as he pleaſeth, freely vouchſafing it to ſome, and withholding it from others. For what can reſtrain him, but that he may do with his own as he pleaſeth? as in the perſon of the Houſeholder he argues. This good pleaſure of God is it into which our Saviour expreſly reſolveth his hiding the Myſteries of the Goſpel from the wiſe and prudent. *Thou haſt hid theſe things from the wiſe and prudent, and revealed them unto babes; even ſo father, for ſo it ſeemed good in thy ſight.* Matth. 20. 15. Matth. 11. 26.

So then, reſerving unto God his Prerogative, I anſwer, That yet however God's hiding the Myſteries of the Goſpel

ſpel from men, may very much, and in many caſes, though not univerſally, be reſolved into the ſins of men. For whereas there are chiefly three ways by which God may be ſaid to hide the Myſteries of the Goſpel from men; namely, by denying to them, or removing from them the means of knowledge; or by with-holding the effectual influences and operation of his Spirit to accompany the means; or by permitting *Satan* to blind them: upon conſideration of the matter we ſhall find, That the ſins of men have frequently very much to do therein, and contribute much towards it; though even here the good pleaſure of God muſt alſo be acknowlegded, who permits it ſo to be, and doth not powerfully interpoſe to hinder it, as he might do if he ſaw good.

1. If God deny the Goſpel to men, 'tis often through their thruſting it away, and keeping it off from themſelves, when 'tis approaching towards them. How often do men oppoſe themſelves againſt it! How often do men decline the light, and chuſe to live in places of darkneſs, where there are no means, or as good as no means of knowledge! So if

if God remove the Goſpel from a People, is it not moſt commonly not only for their own ſin, but by their ſin that 'tis removed? God for their unfruitfulneſs and unthankfulneſs, for their manifold ſins againſt the Goſpel, moſt righteouſly gives them up to be active and inſtrumental themſelves in putting out the light, and ſending the Goſpel far away from themſelves.

2. If God, continuing the Goſpel, and the means of grace to a People, with-hold the powerful influences and co-operation of his Spirit, what is this in effect, but a leaving them to themſelves, ſuffering their luſts, prejudices, love of ſin, and hatred of holineſs, ſo far to prevail in them, as to ſhut and bar up the Soul, and forcibly to keep out the light, or ſo far to weaken the influences and impreſſions of it, as nothing to purpoſe is done upon them.

3. If God hide the Myſteries of his Kingdom from them by giving them up to *Satan* to be blinded and deluded by him, the thing is ſtill upon the matter one and the ſame; for as hath been at large ſhewed, *Satan* effects his purpoſe much by their own ſin, and makes uſe of

of their Corruptions as the Weapons of his warfare againſt the Soul, to keep it under the power of darkneſs.

Now to apply what hath been ſpoken.

USE 1.

This gives us a true account of the reaſon of ſeveral Practiſes of the Church of *Rome*.

As 1*ſt*. Of their vilifying and diſparaging the Holy Scriptures as defective and imperfect, as obſcure and uncertain, and no better than a Noſe of wax that may be turned any way at pleaſure, that may be moulded and ſhaped to every man's fancy, as one of that Party wickedly and and profanely reproacheth it. In ſhort; Their making the word written, inſufficient to inform us touching the matters of our belief and practiſe, and to lead us in the way to Heaven, without the help and ſupplement of Human Traditions.

2. Of their refuſing to bring their Doctrines, Worſhip and Practiſes, to the Teſt and Touchſtone of the Holy Scriptures alone; and of their ſetting up another pretended Infallible Judge of

of Controverſies, not admitting the Scriptures to be the common Umpire and Determiner of them.

3. Of their ſhutting up the Book of the Holy Scriptures, and forbidding it to be read by the People, ſo taking away from them the key of Knowledge. What's the reaſon of theſe their ungodly and abominable Practiſes, but this, *He that doth evil, hateth the light, and cometh not to it, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved?* Their Principles are unſound and rotten, wicked and abominable, their Doctrine falſe, their Worſhip Idolatrous, their Uſages vain and ſuperſtitious, and therefore they hate the light of the Scriptures that diſcovers their Errors, Cheats and Juglings; therefore they decline the light, and run away from it; they defame and reproach it, they ſhut it up, and impriſon it; they do what they can to extinguiſh it, and keep men in darkneſs whereſoever they have power to do it. But bleſſed be God that we are not yet brought into bondage by them; they have not yet prevailed to deprive us of the light of the Goſpel; we have free acceſs to the Holy Scriptures; the Bible lies open before us in our Mother-tongue. O! may we

never by our unthankfulneſs, our not improving the mercies we enjoy, and our other ſins, ſo far provoke God, as that he ſhould ſuffer the Land of our Nativity to be again overſpread with that worſe than *Egyptian* darkneſs.

USE 2.

This diſcovers the true reaſon why many that frequent Publick Ordinances, love and affect ſuch Preaching only as comes not too near the Conſcience, meddles not with their ſpiritual eſtate, toucheth not their own particular darling and beloved ſins. A ſmooth and general Diſcourſe, that deſcends not to the concernments of their own Souls; or it may be, a ſerious and ſmart Sermon, that reproves the ſins of the Age, or the ſins of ſome particular Perſons known to them, thoſe ſins which they themſelves are not guilty of; all this they can hear with much patience, and perhaps with ſome delight, as *Herod* is ſaid to have heard *John Baptiſt gladly*. But if any man ſhall lay open, and ſet before them the great evil of their own ſins, the unſoundneſs of their ſpiritual Eſtate, while they continue in them,

Mar. 6. 20.

the

the extream danger of their present condition, the absolute and indispensable necessity of Regeneration, of sincere and universal Repentance, of sound Conversion, in order to Salvation; if a man shall discourse of our natural proneness to flatter and deceive our selves in these important matters, of our utter unwillingness to know the worst of our selves, and to be truly acquainted with the state of our Souls; of the small number of such as shall be saved, in comparison of them that perish; of the great multitude of them that rest in the outward formalities of Religion, and never go further, and of such as have a name to live, but are dead; I say, if any man shall discourse of these things, how unacceptable and displeasing, how irksome and tedious would it be to many of his Hearers! How would they long to be rid of such a man? hardly forbearing to say of him, as *Ahab* did of *Micaiah*, *I hate this man, because he never prophesied good of me, but evil.* For such plain dealing, a man perhaps might be treated as kindly by some, as the Prophet *Amos* was by *Amaziah*, *Go, flee away*, saith he, *into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; but prophesy*

Amos 7. 12, 13. *no more at Bethel.* Now whence is all this, and what other account can be given of it, but that in my Text, *Every one that doth evil, hateth the light, and cometh not to it, lest his deeds should be reproved?*

USE 3.

This may also acquaint us with the reason why many vicious and ungodly People come so seldom to this place. Their Deeds are evil, their Works are the Works of darkness, and therefore they hate the light. A woful Snare, a sad Intanglement it is in which they are! They hate the light, and come not to it, because their deeds are evil; and yet as long as they come not to the light, they are never likely to be better. But do these People think all is well, while withdrawing themselves from the light, they can make a shift to avoid the sight of their sin and misery, and keep their Consciences asleep? Let them not deceive themselves; the time is coming, when the light will break in upon them, do they what they can to keep it out; *When God will open their eyes, and set their sins in order before them,* as he threatens

threatens the wicked man, the obſtinate and impenitent ſinner. What ſhall I ſay to perſuade theſe Sons of *Japhet*, or rather Sons of *Belial*, to dwell in the Tents of *Shem*, to come to the Houſe of God, and join themſelves to the Aſſemblies of his People? Though I have ſmall hopes that I ſhall be able to ſay any thing that may work upon people ſo much eſtranged from God, and ſo miſerably hardened in their ſins; yet over, and above what hath been ſaid, I ſhall recommend theſe two things to the ſerious conſideration of ſuch perſons, if any of them be at preſent here; for tho we have little of their company here, yet I know not, but that ſome of them may now and then have the curioſity, though not the Religion, to look within theſe Doors, and drop in amongſt us. Pſal. 50. 21.

1. Let them conſider, That the longer they ſhall ſhun the light, and hide their eyes from their ſins, the more frightful and formidable will the view of them be, when God ſhall open their eyes. Such Armies of their Sins, and ſuch fearful Aggravations of them, will then appear, as will fill them with horror and amazement, and without

God's infinite mercy hurry them into the Gulf of utter deſpair. But if this be not enough to fright them out of their profaneneſs; Let them conſider,

1*dly*, That they who will not come to the light here, muſt never expect to be *partakers of the inheritance among the ſaints in light hereafter.* *The houſe of God is the gate of heaven*, as *Jacob* called it. Through this is the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven; and therefore all they who out of Profaneneſs and Irreligion ſhut themſelves out of the Church here, ſhut themſelves out of Heaven; and they who wickedly and profanely exclude themſelves from the Aſſemblies of God's People here, muſt not look to be admitted into the City of the living God, the heavenly *Jeruſalem*, the general Aſſembly, and Church of the Firſt-born which are written in Heaven. A fearful thing! conſider it all ye that ſhun the Word and Ordinances of God, that in your hearts ſay to the Almighty, *Depart from us, we deſire not the knowledge of thy ways*, as the wicked man is deſcribed. If you will not acquaint your ſelves with God here, you muſt never look to enjoy him hereafter; if in effect you bid him

Gen. 28. 17.

Job 21.14.

him depart from you, what elſe can you expect from him, but to hear that dreadful and confounding Sentence, *Depart from me ye curſed into everlaſting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* Tremble at the thoughts of that Sentence, and do not by your obſtinate Profaneneſs and Irreligion, by your contempt of the Houſe, Word, and Ordinances of God, wilfully bring it upon your ſelves.

USE 4.

If the light be ſo unacceptable to wicked men, if they hate it, and cannot endure it; then may They hence inform themſelves what meaſure they may expect from the wicked World, whoſe Office and Calling it is to hold forth the light to others. If indeed they ſtudy to comply with men in their ſins, if they reſolve to ſay nothing but what wicked men would have them; if they flatter them, and build them up in a good opinion of themſelves to their ruine, and cry, Peace, peace to them, unto whom no peace belongs; then will the World like them well, be very friendly to them,

and let them have its good word upon all occaſions. But if in the diſcharge of the Duties of their place, they be faithful to Chriſt who intruſts them, and faithful to the Souls of men, with which they are intruſted, then muſt they make account to meet with little kindneſs from wicked men. If ſuch men hate the light, they can have no great love ordinarily for them that bring it to them. When therefore we are but courſely treated by ſome of them, whoſe good we moſt deſired and endeavoured, we muſt not think it ſtrange. 'Tis a neceſſary and inſeparable appendant of our Calling. 'Tis no other than what befel the Prophets in the *Old Teſtament*, the Apoſtles in the *New*, and Chriſt himſelf. It is impoſſible that we ſhould do our duty faithfully, and not incur the diſpleaſure of ſome thereby. There is no greater evidence of unfaithfulneſs, than when no man is offended. If that ſeem a Paradox, then what think you of that of our Saviour; *Wo be unto you when all men ſpeak well of you?* Luk. 6.26.

To conclude. Seeing thus it is; ſeeing we cannot pleaſe wicked men, unleſs

unleſs we will diſpleaſe God, let the Conſcience of having ſincerely endeavoured to approve our heart to God, and to give no juſt offence to men, bear us up, and ſupport, arm and fortify us againſt all the harſh Cenſures, and all the cauſeleſs and unjuſt Clamours of the World.

The

The Second Sermon.

Jer. XIII. 23.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his ſpots? then may ye alſo do good that are accuſtomed to do evil.

IN theſe words we have a ſhort, but very ſatisfactory account of the Ground of God's ſevere proceedings againſt the *Jews* for their ſins. God had long born with them, he had uſed all ſorts of means to reclaim them: He had ſometimes been drawing them by the Cords of a Man, with Bands of Love; he had been trying to win them by kindneſs; he *was to them as they that take off the yoke on their Jaws, and he laid meat unto them.* He had Hoſ. 11. 4.

treated

treated them with that gentleneſs and kindneſs which is wont to work upon Irrational Creatures, and make the very brute Beaſts, tame, gentle, and tractable; *For even the Ox knoweth his owner, and the Aſs his maſters crib.* Otherwhile he had been trying whether ſeverity might take any better effect upon them; he had been correcting them firſt more favourably, and with much lenity, afterwards more ſharply and ſeverely; and together with other means, he had been ſtill warning, admoniſhing, exhorting, reproving, threatning them by his Prophets, and ſetting before them the Comforts and Rewards of Repentance and Obedience, and the ſad conſequents and iſſues of their diſobedience, in caſe they ſhould ſtill go on in their Sin and Impenitency. But none of theſe things would work upon them; through long cuſtom and continuance in ſin, they were now become incorrigible; 'twas in vain to expect that they ſhould be reformed: All means and endeavours were but loſt upon them. Wherefore ſeeing their Diſeaſe appeared to be incurable, God was reſolved to be rid of them, and to eaſe himſelf of them once for all. They

Iſa. 1. 3.

ſhould

ſhould dwell in his Land no longer, away they muſt into Captivity, and ſuch a Captivity as ſhould not only remove them far from the Land of their Nativity, but ſcatter them up and down, and diſperſe them from one another. So we have their Sin and Puniſhment ſet forth in the words of the Text, and the following Verſe; *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his ſpots? then may ye alſo do good, that are accuſtomed to do evil. Therefore will I ſcatter them as the ſtubble that paſſeth away by the wind of the wilderneſs.*

Before I come to the words, we may by the way obſerve, That 'tis a moſt woful condition to be ſtill incorrigible under all means applyed to humble and reform us. The miſery of ſuch a people lyes in theſe two things.

1. That God is wont to give up ſuch a people to themſelves, to walk in the way of their own Hearts. He ſaith of them, as of the *Jews, Why ſhould ye be ſtricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more*; and as of *Ephraim, Ephraim is joined to Idols, let him alone*; he is ſo nearly joined, and intirely united to them in his Affections, that nothing will

Iſa. 1. 5.

Hoſ. 4. 17.

will withdraw him from them; therefore let him alone, let him take his course, and see what will come of it in the end. And though this may seem to be no great evil, but rather an advantage, and a very desirable liberty in the Judgment of the Sinner, who cannot endure to be curbed or restrained; yet 'tis a very heavy Judgment, and so much worse than any Affliction whatsoever, as the evil of sin is worse than the evil of punishment. And so God speaks of this his Dispensation in words full of high Indignation and Displeasure: *My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me; so I gave them up to their own hearts lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.* As if he had said, I met with them, and was avenged of them for their wretched contempt of me; I let them go on, and suffered them to be as vicious and profligate, as filthy and abominable, as they had a mind to be.

Psal. 81. 11, 12.

2. Another thing in which lyes the Misery of an incorrigible people is, that they are now ripe for Ruin, or for some terrible Judgment. *Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged,* (said God to *Jerusalem*) that is,

Because

Because I used all fit means to purge and reform thee, and yet still thou wallowest in thy filthiness and lewdness, thou are incorrigible; *therefore thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee.* He *that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.* An incorrigible Person, whom no reproofs will work upon, is next door to destruction, to unavoidable destruction, if still he go on; he *shall suddenly be destroyed without remedy*; nothing shall plead for him, or interpose in his behalf to rescue him from destruction. In the 2 *Chron.* 36. 14, 15, 16, 17. God by the Penman of that Book sets forth the great sins of *Judah* and *Jerusalem*, the means he was pleased to make use of to reduce them to obedience, their incorrigibleness under those means; and lastly, the terrible Judgments which thereupon he brought upon them. All the chief of the Priests and the People transgressed very much, after the Abominations of the Heathen, and polluted the House of the Lord which he had hallowed in *Jerusalem: And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising*

Ezek. 24. 13.

Prov. 29. 1

rising up betimes, and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his Prophets, until the wrath of God arose against his people, till there was no remedy; and what was at length the issue of this their incorrigibleness and stubbornness? That follows in the next words; *therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age.* And as the incorrigibleness of this stubborn and stiff-necked people brought the *Chaldees* upon them; so afterwards the like incorrigibleness brought the *Romans* upon their Posterity, to their utter ruin and final desolation; for 'tis their incorrigibleness that our Saviour makes the fore-runner and cause of their destruction by the *Romans*. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together within thee, even as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not; therefore your house is*

Matth. 23. 37, 38.

left

left unto you deſolate. Take notice of this, and lay it to heart all you that have been often reproved for your ſins, and yet you ſtill harden your Necks; unto whom many ſeaſonable Admonitions, and wholeſome Counſels and Advices have been tender'd, but you have ſtopt your Ears againſt them; who have often ſmarted for your ſins, and yet you love them ſtill, and delight in them as much as ever you did; you that have been often in the Furnace of Affliction, and yet your Droſs is not ſeparated from you; I ſay, take notice of the woful condition of incorrigible Sinners, and conſider what awaits you, and will certainly be your portion, unleſs by Repentance you ſpeedily prevent it.

You unteachable and incorrigible Children, whom no Admonitions or Chaſtiſements will reduce to that Dutifulneſs, humble Submiſſion and Obedience which you owe to your Parents; tremble at the thoughts of what may be coming upon you for your ſin. You who tread in the ſteps of *Hophni* and *Phineas*, both in reſpect of your other ſins, and in reſpect of your obſtinate carriage when you are reproved for

them, can you without horrour read or hear what the Spirit of God ſaith concerning them? *They hearkned not to the voice of their father, becauſe the Lord would ſlay them.* You whoſe lewd and ungodly Converſation hath been often reproved and condemned in the Miniſtry of the Word, and yet you are ſtill inſenſible of your danger, and proceed ſtill in your old ways, and walk in the imagination of your heart, to add drunkenneſs to thirſt; conſider what befel ſuch as you are. *They refuſed to hearken, and pulled away the ſhoulder, and ſtopped their ears that they ſhould not hear. Yea, they made their heart as an adamant ſtone, leſt they ſhould hear the law, and the word which the Lord ſent by his Prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of Hoſts. Therefore it is come to paſs, that as he cried, and they would not hear; ſo they cried, and I would not hear, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts.*

1 Sam. 2. 25.

Zech. 7. 11, 12.

You whom no Counſels or Perſwaſions can prevail with to leave your lewd and graceleſs Companions.

You, that notwithſtanding all that can be ſaid or done to keep you in, and withhold you from your wicked Aſſociates, ſay ſtill with that lewd and ungovernable

governable generation, *There is no hope.* Jer. 2, 25.
No, I have loved ſtrangers, and after them will I go: Conſider with fear and trembling what the Prophet ſaid to *Amaziah*, who ſtopt his Ears againſt good advice. *By this I know that God* 2 Chron. 25. 16.
hath determined to deſtroy thee, becauſe thou haſt not hearkened to my counſel. I do not ſay God hath determined to deſtroy you alſo, I take not upon me to be ſo well acquainted with God's ſecret purpoſes; but this I ſay, you are at preſent in the high-way to deſtruction, and you have great cauſe to fear leſt God deſtroy you, as he hath done by other ſuch incorrigible perſons as you are. If you ſtill continue to be like others who have been deſtroyed for the ſame ſins, what reaſon have you to expect more favour than they had? God is not changed, he is ſtill the ſame, his hatred of ſin, his juſtice and ſeverity againſt ſin, is ſtill as great as ever it was.

And ſo much concerning that Obſervation. I come now to that which I chiefly intended. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his ſpots?* That is, they cannot; no Art or Labour can effect it. Waſh and rub the

Skin of the *Ethiopian* while you will, it will retain its natural hew; you may ſooner rub away the Skin, than alter the colour of it: and ſo for thoſe ſpots with which Nature hath mark'd the Leopard, you may by much tampering deſtroy the ſubject of them, but the ſubject remaining, you can never get out the ſpots. And little leſs difficulty there is in removing thoſe habitual Inclinations to ſin, which long cuſtom hath produced: The caſe is much alike, to waſh a Blackamoor white, and to get him to do good that is accuſtomed to do evil. So then 'tis a Proverbial compariſon, by which is ſignified the extream difficulty of delivering a Man from thoſe vicious impreſſions which cuſtom in ſin hath made upon him. And that's the thing which I purpoſe to treat of.

Cuſtom in ſin makes it very difficult to leave ſin. There needs little other proof hereof than our own Experience. Though ſome vicious Perſons, who are taken in hand, and dealt with betimes, may be more eaſily drawn off from their ſinful courſes, yet how rare a thing is it to ſee any man recovered, who hath long been exerciſed in a trade of ſin! Shall you eaſily prevail with the

in-

intemperate, or luſtful, or ambitious, or covetous perſon, to leave thoſe paths of ſin which have been long trodden by them? So great is the force of cuſtom in ſin, that men will by no Arguments be perſwaded to forſake thoſe long-continued ſinful practices, which are continually attended with ſo many viſible and great inconveniences, as one would think were ſufficient to make any man weary of ſuch courſes.

Take for an inſtance but a wandring Beggar, that neceſſarily undergoes many hardſhips, and runs many hazards in that irregular and wicked courſe of life which he hath been wonted to, and you ſhall in vain tempt him to leave it by the beſt proviſions and accommodations which you can proffer him in any ſetled way of honeſt Imployment.

Or take a nearer inſtance in the ſame kind; When almoſt do you ever ſee one of our poor people whoſe hands refuſe to labour, and who make a trade of begging from Door to Door; I ſay, when almoſt do you ſee any ſuch Perſon reclaimed, and brought to endeavour to get his Living in any honeſt and laborious Calling? I deny not, but 'tis poſſible there maybe inſtances of

ſome ſuch that have been reduced to an orderly courſe of life; but I believe ſuch inſtances are very rare, eſpecially of thoſe who have from their Childhood been addicted to that diſorderly courſe, as too many are; the only Breeding and Education which their Parents give them, being to teach them how to eat the Bread of idleneſs, and live upon the Charity of others, if that may be called Charity which is beſtowed upon ſuch people.

The grounds of this point are theſe.

1. Cuſtom begets a ſtrong, fixed and habitual Inclination to ſin. Hence a Man is ever in a readineſs to yield to, and comply with any Temptation to that ſin unto which he hath been accuſtomed. No ſooner is occaſion offered, but it meets with a preparation of heart to embrace it. Inſtead of preparing to reſiſt Temptations when they begin to approach, and offer themſelves, he that hath been accuſtomed to ſin, will meet them half way, invite them to come on, and bid them welcome; inſtead of declining Temptations, he will ſeek after them, and ſtudiouſly make proviſion for his Luſts. For cuſtom

ſtom is now become another Nature to him, and he ſeems to enjoy himſelf no longer than he is complying with it. To be divorc'd and ſeparated from ſuch ſins, is a moſt grievous thing; 'tis as the pulling out of a right Eye, or the cutting off of a right Hand.

2. Cuſtom in ſin brings on delight in ſin; the actions that are natural, are moſtly accompanied with ſome pleaſure: And ſo are ſinful actions, when cuſtom hath made them familiar to us, and given them, as it were, the ſtamp of Nature. 'Tis ſtrange that a Man ſhould be ſenſible of any pleaſure or delight at all in ſome ſins; and yet through cuſtom there is that content and complacency in them, that it is as death to forſake them. To ſit in an obſcure Ale-houſe, and to be continually pouring in that which to a ſober Man would be little better than a Potion; to ſpend days and nights in a dark hole amidſt the ſtink of Vomits and Spewings round about, to the blaſting of a Man's Reputation, the impairing of his Health, the miſ-ſpending of his time, and the waſting away of that which it may be Wife and Children want at home; who would think there ſhould

be any content in ſuch a Life? And yet there are, who by cuſtom have made it ſo pleaſurable to them, that they prefer it before all the contents and ſatisfactions that a fair Houſe, a Table richly ſpread, and the Society of their neareſt Relations can afford them, and whatever other advantages and accommodations might render their converſe at home comfortable and delightſom. If cuſtom hath once made ſuch baſe and dirty ways of ſin pleaſant, you ſhall in vain tempt them out of them, or indeavour to draw them off from them by the faireſt and moſt taking proffers that you can make them.

3. Cuſtom in ſin blinds the mind, and corrupts the judgment, ſo that a man ceaſeth to be a competent judge of the nature of things, and of the differences between good and evil. By degrees he is beſotted, and comes to be in great meaſure deprived of the reaſon of a man; ſo far hath ſin darkened his underſtanding, and weakened his Intellectuals for judging of Spiritual things.

Rom. 1. 28 He is given up *to a reprobate mind*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks; he puts good for evil, and evil for good; light for darkneſs, and darkneſs for light. And when

when the light of reaſon is darkened, and the Eye of the Soul is put out; when the leading and governing Faculty of the Soul is thus depraved, it muſt needs be a difficult thing to draw a man off from thoſe ways, the evil whereof he cannot diſcern, nor will be apprehenſive of.

4. Cuſtom in ſin ſcareth the Conſcience, and draws ſuch a callus or brawneſs over it, as it becomes inſenſible. At firſt there is ſome tenderneſs of Conſcience, ſome reluctancy, and ſhrinking back from thoſe ſins which after a frequent repetition and cuſtomary practice of them, a man makes no bones of, but ſmoothly ſwallows down. He that at firſt durſt not tell a Lie, or if he were at any time overtaken, was wont to be much troubled afterwards; yet upon a cuſtomary practice of that ſin, will add Lies to Lies, and ſtand to them moſt impudently and obſtinately: He that ſeemed to fear an Oath, will through cuſtomary Swearing arrive at that degree of inſenſibleneſs, that he will not ſtick to multiply Oaths, and Perjuries alſo, if need be, and all this without any touch of remorſe, any gainſayings or grudgings of his Conſcience.

Now

Now when a Man through cuſtom in ſin comes to that paſs, that his Conſcience is quiet, and doth not either interpoſe before the commiſſion of ſin to hinder him, or moleſt him, and diſturb his peace afterwards, 'twill be no eaſie matter to diſengage him from that ſin.

5. Cuſtom in ſin doth conſequently harden the heart againſt all means by which the Sinner ſhould be reclaimed.

1. It hardens the heart againſt the Word. The threatnings thereof, and all the moſt dreadful denunciations of Judgments, make no impreſſion upon ſuch a Mans heart; 'tis as Steel or Adamant that will not yield or relent.

2. Neither will the wholeſome Counſels, Advices or Admonitions of Friends and Chriſtian Acquaintance work upon it. He hath no ſenſe of any thing which in that way is offered him for his good: His Ears are ſtopt againſt the voice of the Charmer, Charm he never ſo wiſely.

3. He is fortified with Armour of proof againſt all Providences, by which he might be ſtopt in his courſe of ſin, or reduced from the Errour of his ways. Let God oppoſe him in his ſinful courſe,

let

let him hedge up his ways with Thorns, or ſtand before him with a drawn Sword, all is one, on he will fearleſly and preſumptuouſly, and adventure himſelf upon the thick Boſſes of his Buckler, in *Job*'s phraſe.

6. Cuſtom in Sin emboldens Satan to tempt. Where the Conſcience is tender, and the Heart is ſenſible of the evil, and danger of Sin, and where he hath been formerly reſiſted and repelled, there if he tempt, yet he doth it with leſs confidence of prevailing, and with ſome degree of Cowardly Expectation of being worſted; but where he hath to do with thoſe who have been long accuſtomed to the Sin he would again draw them into, he makes little queſtion of prevailing, as knowing well the ſearedneſs of their Conſciences, the hardneſs of their Hearts, and their ſtrong propenſions to the ſin unto which he is about to tempt them; as alſo remembring how often his Temptations in the ſame kind have already been ſucceſsful.

7. By Cuſtom in ſin God is provoked to leave a Man to himſelf, to the power of Satan, and the efficacy of Temptation; and in way of his righte-

ous

ous Judgment to give him up to a further degree of impenitency and hardneſs of heart.

USE 1.

Then let ſuch as have been long accuſtomed to any ways of Sin, take heed that they make not account it will be an eaſie matter to leave thoſe ways. You may be apt to think that you can come off from thoſe your ſinful courſes at pleaſure; that 'tis but take up Reſolutions againſt them, and you ſhall be diſengaged and freed from them preſently: But herein you would much deceive your ſelf. 'Tis not ſo eaſie a matter to deliver your ſelf from the power of that ſin which you have been ſo long accuſtomed unto: When you addreſs your ſelf to endeavour to leave it, you will find other work of it. You may take up Reſolutions upon Reſolutions, and yet you may be ſtill where you were at firſt, as much enſlaved to your Sin as ever, and as unable to reſiſt any Temptation to it. They muſt be ſtrong and firm Reſolutions, and thoſe frequently renewed, that will ſtand you in ſtead where Sin hath by cuſtom gotten

ten ſuch poſſeſſion of you: And beſides, you muſt look higher than your own Reſolutions, you muſt earneſtly implore God's help againſt your ſelf, ſo miſerably brought under and ſubjected to the power of Sin. Never think to prevail againſt thoſe Sins which Cuſtom hath ſtrengthened and confirmed in you, without much Prayer to God, great watchfulneſs over your ſelf, and diligence in the uſe of all other means, whereby the power of Sin may be weakened.

USE 2.

You muſt therefore acknowledge it to be a great Mercy, if you meet with Croſſes and Afflictions in your ſinful ways early, and before longer Cuſtom in Sin hath produced thoſe confirmed, radicated, and obſtinate habits of Sin which cannot eaſily be removed. God is very gracious to ſome this way; he takes them up ſharply, and chaſtens them ſeverely betimes: They no ſooner enter upon the ways of Sin, but he oppoſeth himſelf againſt them, and hedgeth up their way with Thorns. This is very grievous and afflicting to our corrupt

corrupt Nature, which can endure no reſtraint: But we little conſider or underſtand how much we are obliged to God for his Care of us herein. How many others are there whom he ſuffers to go on in their Sins without check or controul, till they contract thoſe ſtrong habits of Sin which they are never rid of as long as they live. Do you think your ſelf hardly dealt with, that God doth not ſuffer you alſo to take your courſe, and make your ſelf as vile here, and as miſerable hereafter, as others? 'Tis God's exceeding great kindneſs to you, that he imbitters unto you the beginnings of Sin, and ſtrews the firſt entrance into ſinful ways with Briars and Prickles, ſo that you cannot go on, but you muſt hurt your ſelf. It ſeems you would have liked it better, if the way to Hell had been ſtrewed with Roſes for you. Beware you do not miſinterpret God's Providence: If he be pleaſed to uſe ſeaſonable means to make you weary of the ways of Sin, before you are more hardened in them, count it a ſingular favour, and an effect of that his gracious care of you, for which you can never be enough thankful.

USE

USE 3.

This diſcovers the folly and danger of deferring Repentance, and eſpecially of putting it off till the time of Sickneſs, or till our Deathbed. The longer we defer Repentance, the more difficult will the buſineſs be, through ſo long cuſtom in Sin. If you find it hard at preſent to think of leaving your Sins, what will it be hereafter when they will have taken deeper root in you, and when your habitual Inclinations to them will be ſtronger? And as for putting off Repentance till the time of Sickneſs or Death; what wiſe Man would put off a work of the greateſt Importance, and the moſt difficult work, and a work that will be ſtill more difficult every day the longer 'tis put off; I ſay, what wiſe Man would put off ſuch a work till that time, when he will be weakeſt and moſt unable to undertake it, and go thorough with it? Are the infirmities of Sickneſs, are the pains and languiſhings of a Death-bed likely to make you ſtronger and abler for this work? Is that a fit ſeaſon to be choſen beforehand for beginning to break and ſubdue thoſe in-

inveterate Corruptions in you that have been gathering ſtrength all your days? Your greateſt and moſt implacable Enemy, the Devil himſelf, could not direct you to the choice of a more unfit ſeaſon for that buſineſs. And yet beſides, who knows whether or no you ſhall then have any opportunity of endeavouring to do any thing in that great work which you put off till then, as if it were of all other the fitteſt ſeaſon for it? Who can tell you but you may be ſo ſuddenly and violently ſurprized with Sickneſs, and cut off, that you may have no time to beſtow one ſerious Thought upon that Buſineſs, which is of no leſs Concernment to you than your Souls Eternal Happineſs or Miſery? Or if you ſhould not be ſo quickly taken away, yet who can tell but you may then be deprived of the uſe of Reaſon; and what then will become of this great buſineſs, which being put off till that time, muſt be then diſpatch'd, or never?

USE 4.

This ſhould admoniſh the younger
Eccl. 12.1. ſort to *remember their Creator in the days of their youth*, as *Solomon* counſels them,

them. To conſecrate their tender years to God, before cuſtom of ſin hath ſtrengthened vicious Inclinations in them, and hardened their hearts againſt God. As 'tis much more acceptable to God, when we give him the Firſt-fruits, when we offer up to him the flower of our age, ſo 'tis much more eaſie and comfortable for us: For hereby we prevent thoſe habits of ſin, which time and cuſtom would beget, to our far greater trouble afterwards. Thoſe Vices which in younger years diſcover themſelves, are more eaſily pluck'd up, as young Weeds out of the Soil in which they have not as yet taken any deep root. Old habits of ſin, ſo cloſe do they ſtick to us, ſo deeply are they rooted in us, and ſo ſtrongly and intricately are their Roots twiſted together with our Nature, that the plucking of them up, is as the rooting up of a great Oke that hath the advantage of many years growth to ſettle it ſelf in the ground. You who are young, if you be wiſe, create not ſo much trouble to your ſelves, as to let ſin grow old and ſtrong in you, before you break it off, or pluck it up by repentance.

USE 5.

This ſhould alſo prevail with Parents to be very careful of their Childrens Education, beginning to reſtrain and beat down ſin in them in ſeaſon, that ſo cuſtom in ſin, and all the ſad effects thereof may be prevented. How happy had it been, both for many Parents and Children, if ſeaſonable Reſtraints and Chaſtiſements had been applied, before the cuſtomary practice of ſin had made them obſtinate and incorrigible! The neglect whereof, how much ſorrow and heart-breaking doth it occaſion to Parents, and how much ſin and miſery to Children! Nothing is more ordinary, than to hear the ſad Complaints that Parents make of the ſtubbornneſs and untractableneſs of their Children, and of thoſe ſinful courſes which they addict themſelves unto, and cannot be drawn off from by all the means they can think of to reclaim them: But whom may too many Parents thank for it, rather than themſelves, whoſe indulgence to them, or neglect of them in their tender years hath been the cauſe? They would not begin with them in ſeaſon, while

while they were tender and pliable; and now they are by long practice of ſin become ſtubborn and refractory: then they would not reſtrain them, and now they cannot do it. And what greater miſchief can Parents do their Children, than by giving them the head, and laying the Reins on their neck when they are young, whereby they come to be irreclaimably and deſperately hardened in ſin when they grow up? While Parents complain of Children, may not Children as juſtly complain of Parents, that have by their neglect of them betrayed them to ſin and *Satan*. Many ſuch Children, when by their ſins they have come to ſhameful ends, have moſt paſſionately cried out againſt their Parents, whoſe ill Example, or neglect to correct them, had brought them to that miſery: and could we liſten to the Language of thoſe who are in Hell, there is no doubt but our ears would tingle to hear the lamentable Outcries and curſes of the Souls of undone Children, againſt thoſe whoſe Parental Relation ſhould have ingaged them to have left no means untried for keeping them from that place of torment.

USE 6.

Let no Children think it any part of their misery or unhappiness, that by God's Providence they are under the government and discipline of those Parents who keep them in, and restrain them; who endeavour to nip the first buddings and blossomings of sin in them; who will not suffer them to run with others to that excess of riot which their corrupt Natures would be gratified with; in a word, who use the best means they can for preventing of those evil Customs and Habits of sin, which would be the misery of both Parents and Children. Let them think themselves well at ease under the Discipline of such Parents, and willingly submit their Necks to that Yoke which is laid upon them for their good. If they understand themselves, and their highest concernment, they will think themselves happier, a thousand times happier under that restraint, than if they had all that sinful liberty which man's corrupt Nature reacheth out after, and eagerly pursueth.

USE 7.

Hence moreover we may learn, how great a benefit 'tis to live under Magiſtracy, where good Laws are duly executed, and Sin is ſeverely puniſhed. This through God's bleſſing is a means of the timely ſtopping of that courſe of ſin in many, which without this help would end in obſtinacy and incorrigibleneſs. The wholſome ſeverity of good Laws put in execution, prevents the growth of ſin, and the ripening of it into thoſe habits, which making the Sinner's condition incurable, ripens him for his ruin. 'Tis no privilege, but a great miſery, to live in a place where evey man may do what is good in his own eyes, and where there is no Magiſtrate to put any man to ſhame. This was the condition of *Laiſh* before its deſtruction. Judges 18. 7

USE 8.

This ſhews how much thankfulneſs is due unto God from thoſe unto whom God hath been pleaſed to give converting grace after a long courſe of ſin, by

which they were ſo wofully hardened, as nothing would work upon them. When God converts old and obdurate Sinners, when he cures thoſe Spiritual Diſeaſes that ſeemed now to be paſt all cure, how doth he hereby magnify the power of his Grace, and how doth he exalt the riches of his Mercy! When God converts a young Sinner, he quickeneth the dead; but when he converts old Sinners, he quickeneth thoſe who
V. 12. are as it were twice dead, as St. *Jude* ſpeaks; dead by nature, and dead by long cuſtom in ſin, which had made them twofold more the Children of Hell, than they were by nature. If converting Grace, wherever God is mercifully pleaſed to vouchſafe it, calls for thankfulneſs; ſurely when 'tis vouchſafed to old ſinners, it calls for double thankfulneſs. And ſo I have done with the Uſes of this Point. It remains that I anſwer one Objection, and ſo conclude.

Obj. If cuſtom in ſin, make it ſo extreamly difficult to leave ſin; if to endeavour to reclaim ſuch a one, be as it were to attempt to waſh a Blackmore white, this may ſeem to be a great dif-

diſcouragement to any man's endeavours for reforming old Sinners.

Anſ. 'Tis certainly a great diſcouragement, and one of the greateſt that is; but yet ſhould it not take a man off from ſeeking the Converſion even of ſuch. For,

1. 'Tis a Duty; and ſo the difficulty and doubtfulneſs of ſucceſs doth not diſcharge a man from it.

2. Though it be extreamly difficult, yet 'tis not impoſſible. Old Sinners have ſometimes obtained mercy, and God hath no where declared his purpoſe of denying converting Grace to ſuch, abſolutely and univerſally.

3. The more inveterate the habits of ſin by long cuſtom contracted, are grown, the ſadder is the Condition of ſuch, and the louder doth it call upon us to lend them our beſt help for reſcuing them out of the Snare of the Devil.

4. Whatſoever the iſſue of our Endeavour may be, God will be thereby glorified, and *we ſhall be unto God a ſweet ſavour of Chriſt in them that are ſaved, and in them that periſh.* 2 Cor. 2. 15.

5. Though our Endeavours ſhould prove ſucceſleſs, yet ſhall they be nevertheleſs accepted of God, and rewarded. *I have laboured in vain, I have ſpent my ſtrength for nought, and in vain; yet ſurely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work is with my God.*

Iſa. 49. 4.

The

The Third Sermon.

Ephes. V. 15, 16.

See then that ye walk circumſpectly, not as fools, but as wiſe, redeeming the time, becauſe the days are evil.

HESE Words, though containing in themſelves an intire ſenſe, have ſome coherence with what went before, as the Particle οὖν, *then* (as we render it) or *thereſore*, implies. Βλέπετε οὖν, *See then that ye walk circumſpectly.* Which Particle ſeems to look back upon what the Apoſtle had ſaid, *v.* 8. touching their tranſlation from darkneſs to light; from the darkneſs of *Gentiliſm*, to the light of the Goſpel. *Ye were ſometimes darkneſs*, ſaith he, *but now are ye light in the Lord.* Whence he preſently in-

fers

fers in the ſame verſe, *walk as children of the light.* And again, *v.* 11. *Have no fellowſhip with the unfruitful works of darkneſs, but rather reprove them.* Seeing they were enlightned, he exhorts them to a converſation ſuitable to their preſent ſtate. And this yet once more he preſſeth them unto in the words of my Text; *See then that ye walk circumſpectly:* that is, Being now no longer in darkneſs, but in the light, Take heed that you indulge not your ſelves in thoſe ſins, and in that ſinful liberty which formerly you did, when as yet the light of the Goſpel had not been afforded you. Then you led your lives as you pleaſed, following the dictates of your dark Underſtandings, and the corrupt inclinations of your ſinful Natures; but now better things are expected from you. This ſeems to be the connexion of the words with the Apoſtle's former diſcourſe; but I ſhall not take any notice of what might be obſerved from the coherence, but keep my ſelf to the words abſolutely conſidered, without any reflection upon the dependance of them. In the words we have,

1. A

1. A great and weighty Duty ſtrictly enjoined; *See that ye walk circumſpectly.*

2. An Argument by which the Duty is enforced; an Argument at leaſt implied in thoſe words, *not as fools, but as wiſe.* As if he had ſaid, *See that ye walk circumſpectly*, becauſe 'tis our wiſdom ſo to walk, and our folly if we do not.

3. We have one ſpecial inſtance of our circumſpect walking, or in which our circumſpection ſhould be ſhewed; *redeeming the time.* And,

4. An Argument, or Reaſon, to enforce that alſo; *becauſe the days are evil.*

Of all theſe in order.

The *firſt* thing to be ſpoken to, is, The Duty enjoined; *See that ye walk circumſpectly.* So then, the point to be treated of, is, That 'tis our duty to walk circumſpectly.

In diſcourſing of this point, I ſhall

1. Shew what 'tis to walk circumſpectly.

2. I ſhall further confirm the point by other parallel Scriptures.

3. I

3. I ſhall give the Reaſons of it:
4. I ſhall make ſome Application of it.

Concerning the *firſt* of theſe, what it is to walk circumſpectly, I ſhall ſpeak
1ſt, Negatively.
2dly, Affirmatively.
I ſhall firſt ſhew what it is not, and then what it is. Negatively then,

1. The circumſpect walking here enjoined, doth not lie in an affected ſingularity; as when a man walks contrary to other men, with no other deſign, nor to no other end, than that he may not be like them, but be a perſon alone, and one by himſelf. God never calls us to this ſeparation from the World: Neither hath this been the practice of holy men, whoſe Example is in Scripture ſet before us for our imitation. S. *Paul* profeſſeth his condeſcenſion to men, and compliance with them in all lawful things, that he might win them to Chriſt. *Unto the Jews I became as a Jew*, ſaith he, *that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men,*

1 Cor 9. 20, 21, 22.

that

that I might by all means ſave ſome. How far was he from ſtudying to be unlike to other men, who thus ſtudied to apply himſelf to all men, and conform himſelf to them, ſo far as without ſin he might do it! Yet here, let no man abuſe this Example of the Apoſtle, and plead it for juſtifying his conforming himſelf to the ſinful practices of every Company he lights on. The Apoſtle never gave any man ſuch Example. This had been contrary to his own Doctrine, who chargeth us *not to conform our ſelves to this world*, that is, to this wicked and ſinful World, ſo far as ſuch; And to *abhor that which is evil*; Yea, *to abſtain from all appearance of evil.* But however, to go as far away from other men as we can, and to ſtudy to be oppoſite to them in thoſe things in which we may lawfully conform to them, and eſpecially where we may hope to do any good by our innocent compliance with them, is a ſingularity which God neither requireth of us, nor approves of. The root of this affected ſingularity, as we have moſt reaſon to fear, is Pride. 'Tis a manifeſt conceit, and good opinion of his own wiſdom, that makes him chuſe a way different from other

Rom. 12. 2.

Rom. 12. 9. 1 Theſſ. 5. 22.

other men. And as the root, ſo the fruit of it is pride: For being now in this ſingular way which his ſelf-conceit hath put him into, he pleaſeth himſelf therein, and values himſelf accordingly, making account that he is ſo much better than other men, by how much his practice is different from them.

2. Circumſpect walking doth not lie in a ſuperſtitious ſingularity, whereby a man placeth Duty and Religion in thoſe things in which God hath placed none. This was the ſin of the old *Phariſees*, who *taught for doctrines the commandments of men*; that is, for Divine Doctrines, for the Precepts and Injunctions of God. And this is the ſin of the Modern *Phariſees*, thoſe of the Church of *Rome*, who tread in their ſteps: And ſuch, I fear, is the ſingularity of thoſe among our ſelves, whom we call *Quakers*. Though theſe Phariſaical Singularities may gain men a great reputation for Religion and Sanctity among men of their own Party, as do the different Habits, Diet, courſe of life, uſages, and practices of the ſeveral Religious Orders in the Church of *Rome*; yet can they never commend them to God. Of all theſe ſuperſtitious Singularities

Matth. 15. 9.

rities by which they would ſeparate and diſtinguiſh themſelves from the Secular and Irreligious World, in which they pride themſelves as matters highly acceptable and meritorious in the ſight of God, and for which others of their own way admire, and even adore them; I ſay of all theſe things God ſaith, *Who hath required them at your hands?* That's all the thanks they muſt expect of him for them. Neither is this all; he looks upon their placing Religion and Sanctity in thoſe things in which he hath placed none, as a bold and ſaucy entrenchment upon his own Authority and Prerogative. And indeed, what is it better, when Men ſhall take upon them to be Legiſlators in God's room, making thoſe things to be Sins and Duties which he never made ſo? Moſt ſevere is the threatning againſt ſuch as add to the Word of God, which in effect theſe Men do; *God will add unto them the plagues that are written therein.* Rev. 22. 18.

3. Circumſpect walking doth not conſiſt in a ſcrupulous ſingularity. I diſtinguiſh this from the former; that is the ſingularity of bold and preſumptuous Perſons; this of weak, and not ſufficiently-informed tender Conſciences,

ences, that call for our Pity and Compaſſions, rather than our Indignation, foraſmuch as they would be glad to be better informed, and differ from the lawful practice of other Men conſcientiouſly, and to no other end than that they might not offend God, as they groundlelly and erroneouſly apprehend they might. Though no Man's Error commends him unto God, yet his Carriage under an Error may; and this is the caſe of theſe Perſons. And it was the very caſe of thoſe Conſcientious, though miſtaken, *Jewiſh* Believers at *Rome*, who not out of perverſeneſs or turbulent oppoſition, but out of pure diſſatisfaction in point of Conſcience, did ſtill obſerve thoſe days, the obſervation whereof God then no longer required; and ſtill forbear to eat thoſe Meats which God then permitted to be eaten. Of thoſe weak and miſtaken Believers the Apoſtle ſaith, *He that regardeth a day, regardeth it to the Lord; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not.* His meaning is, That doing what they did out of Conſcience, though miſinformed, they (as their preſent condition was) did well, and ſo far had acceptance with God. But ſtill I ſay, though

Rom. 14. 6.

though there may be ſomething that is good in a Man's not adventuring to go againſt the dictates of an Erroneous Conſcience, namely, a fear of offending God if he ſhould do otherwiſe than he doth, yet the circumſpect walking here enjoined conſiſts not in ſuch a ſingularity; which being grounded on a miſtake, a Man is bound to endeavour to be rid of it, and to be delivered from it as ſoon as he can. And the rather, becauſe as the Circumſtances may be in which a Man is, it may be moſt dangerous and pernicious to lye under his miſtake, and continue in his Errour but one day or hour: For the Errour may be ſuch as may put him upon deſperate Attempts, or horrid Sins. Our Saviour ſaith, there would be thoſe who would think they did God ſervice by killing his Servants. A Man's Errour may be ſuch as may not only deprive him of ſome of thoſe Liberties which he might lawfully take, but they may ingage him in a conſtant neglect of his Duty, or oppoſition to that lawful Authority which God hath ſet over him. In theſe and the like caſes a Mans miſtake or miſinformation will not excuſe him before God, when he ſhall call him to an account. Joh. 16. 2.

And ſo much may ſuffice to have been ſpoken of circumſpect walking negatively; it now follows that I ſpeak of it affirmatively. To walk circumſpectly, is a large and comprehenſive thing. Walking takes in the whole courſe of a Mans Life, our whole carriage and deportment both with relation to God and Man. [a] *I beſeech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart.* [b] *He that walketh righteouſly ſhall dwell on high, his place of defence ſhall be the munition of rocks.* [c] *Withdraw your ſelves from every brother that walketh diſorderly*; that is, from every Profeſſor of the Chriſtian Religion, that is of an irregular and diſorderly Converſation. And on the contrary, to walk circumſpectly, is to order our Converſation, and regulate our Lives with the greateſt care, ſolicitude, and heedfulneſs. The word ἀκριβῶς here uſed, may be rendred, accurately or exactly; and ſo to walk requires great heed and diligence. So the ſame word is taken, Ἀκριβῶς ἐξετάσατε, *ſearch diligently after the young child*, ſaid *Herod* to the Wiſe Men; and ſo in the Verſe before, ἠκρίβωσε, he diligently or exactly enquired the time when the Star appeared.

[a] 2 King 20. 3.
[b] Iſa. 33. 15, 16.
[c] 2 Theſ. 3. 6.
Mat. 2. 8.

peared. Briefly therefore, to walk circumſpectly is to uſe our utmoſt care and diligence to pleaſe God in all things, and to yield obedience to all his Commandments; to perform every known Duty, and to avoid every known ſin; 'tis with the Apoſtle, *Herein to exerciſe our ſelves to have always a Conſcience void of offence toward God and toward men.* Act. 24. 16 'Tis to make this our daily work, and the great and conſtant buſineſs of our Lives.

From what hath been ſaid, 'tis manifeſt that circumſpect walking implies,

1. An heeding and obſerving all our ways with relation to the Rule; and,

2. A careful endeavour in all things to conform our ſelves to the Rule; ſo that he, and he only walks circumſpectly, who hath the Rule always before him, ponders and conſiders all his paths with relation to it, and orders all his ſteps accordingly, at leaſt who ſincerely endeavours ſo to do.

Now in the ſecond place, That 'tis our Duty to walk circumſpectly, may be confirmed from divers other Scriptures enjoining it, though not in the ſame terms, yet in other words and

expreſſions to the ſame effect. When God had given the *Iſraelites* the Ten Commandments, and many other particular Laws, he addeth this ſtrict charge for the due obſervance of them,

Exod. 23. 13. *In all things that I have ſaid unto you be circumſpect*; which charge though it did in a ſpecial manner concern that people, yet it reacheth us alſo in reference to whatever God hath enjoined us, there being every way as much reaſon that we ſhould be circumſpect, and in ſome reſpects more, we having greater light, and clearer revelations of the Will of God under the Goſpel than they had under the Law; as alſo greater Encouragements to obedience by the more full diſcoveries of the Rewards of obedience in the other World. So again,

Joſh. 22. 5. Joſh. 23. 11 *Take diligent heed to do the commandments and the law. Take good heed unto your ſelves that ye love the Lord your God*; which love was to be ſhewed by cleaving to him, and obeying him, as

Pſa. 119. 9. there afterwards it follows. *Wherewith ſhall a young man cleanſe his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

Prov. 4. 25, 26, 27. *Let thine eyes look right on, let thine eyelids look ſtraight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be eſta-*

eſtabliſhed. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left : remove thy foot from evil. By all which variety of expreſſions we are required to be wary and circumſpect in all our ways, that we may not in any thing ſwerve from the Rule. And this is that which in the New Teſtament is ſo often enjoined under the Metaphorical expreſſions of watching and watchfulneſs.

Mat 24.42 Mat.25 13. 1 Cor. 16. 13. 1 Theſ 5. 6. Rev. 3. 2.

And ſo I come to the third thing propounded, which was to give the reaſons why we are to walk circumſpectly ; and they are many.

1. In regard of Gods Preſence and Eye. *He compaſſeth our path, and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.* He accurately and narrowly obſerves us: *He marketh all our paths.* He conſidereth and throughly weigheth all our actions, and every ſtep we take ; *He pondereth all our goings.* And not only our ways and outward actions, but our hearts and the ſecret frame of them ; *He pondereth the hearts* ; and *he weigheth the ſpirits.* Add hereunto the infinite holineſs of that God who thus obſerves us, and whoſe

Pſa.139.3. Prov.15 3 Job 33.11. Prov 5.21. Prov.21.2. Prov.16.2.

Hab. 1. 13. Eye is continually upon us; *He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.* Now what heedfulneſs and circumſpection can be too much in all our actions, where there is ſuch an obſerver and witneſs of every thing we do?

2. We muſt walk circumſpectly in regard of Satan the Enemy of Souls, who is ever lying in wait for us to entrap us, and *as a roaring Lyon is ſtill walking about ſeeking whom he may devour.* He hath his *wiles* and *devices* to overreach us. He hath his grins and *ſnares* laid in all places to catch us. Now if a Man had a malicious Enemy always following him, ever eying and obſerving him, and ready to catch at any thing to be made uſe of for his ruin, he would think it highly concerned him to be circumſpect, and that he could not be too wary to prevent and cut off all advantages againſt himſelf.

1 Pet. 5. 8. 2 Cor. 2. 11 2 Tim. 3. 7

3. It concerns us to be circumſpect in regard of the World that obſerves our actions, and is ready to make the worſt conſtruction of them; ſuch is the injuſtice and malignity of this evil World, that many times your beſt actions ſhall be moſt harſhly cenſured; how much more

more thoſe paſſages of your Life that are of a doubtful nature, and may be well or ill interpreted, as Men ſtand affected towards you. Upon this account it is that the Apoſtle exhorts us to *walk in wiſdom towards them that are without*; Col. 4. 5. and our Saviour cautions us to be *wiſe as ſerpents, but harmleſs as doves.* Mat. 10. 16

4. It concerns us to be circumſpect in reſpect of our ſelves, and the corruption of our Nature, in reſpect of the great danger we are in from within, though we had no Enemy without us. Our hearts are falſe and treacherous, ſtrongly inclined to evil, and ready to comply with all Temptations: *The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked.* Jer. 17. 9. Having ſuch a dangerous Inmate within our own Boſoms, it ſtands us upon to walk circumſpectly, and to think our ſelves no longer ſafe than we keep a ſtrict guard over our ſelves, and carefully heed all our goings, that we may never tread beſide that narrow path which we are required to walk in.

5. It concerns us to walk circumſpectly in regard of the ſtrict account we muſt hereafter give of all our ways. *God will bring every work to judgment,* Eccleſ. 12. 14.

with every ſecret thing whether it be good,
[a] 2 Cor. 5. 10. *or whether it be evil.* [a] *We muſt all appear before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done,*
[b] Mat. 12. 36. *whether it be good or bad.* [b] *Of every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give an account thereof at the day of judgment*: When they ſhall be accountable to God for their Omiſſions as well as for
Mat. 25. 41, 42, 43. their Commiſſions. They who verily believe they muſt be called to ſo ſtrict an account, how can they think they can ever walk ſtrictly and circumſpectly enough? Believing and expecting this
2 Pet. 3. 11 great day of reckoning, *what manner of perſons ought we to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs?* As the Apoſtle ſpeaks.

6. It behoves us to walk circumſpectly in regard of the high and everlaſting concernment of our ways, and walking while we are here. *Ab hoc momento pendet eternitas.* As we demean our ſelves, ſo we muſt fare hereafter for ever; As a Man ſoweth here, ſo ſhall
Gal. 6. 7, 8. he reap hereafter. *He that ſoweth to the fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption; and he that ſoweth to the ſpirit, ſhall of the ſpirit reap life everlaſting.* A ſhort time

time is here allotted us to be improved for our everlaſting happineſs in another World. If this time be neglected, it will not be long e're the things belonging to our peace will be hid from our Eyes. There will thenceforth be no more offers of Mercies, no more opportunities of making our peace with God. There will be no more place to Eternity for redeeming time, and correcting the Errours and Miſcarriages of our heedleſs and uncircumſpect walking. O then how great ſhould our care, how exact ſhould our circumſpection be, while the day of grace laſteth, and while opportunity is afforded us of laying up a good Foundation for the time to come, that we may lay hold of Eternal Life!

I come now to the uſes of this point. Is it the Duty of every Chriſtian to walk circumſpectly?

USE 1.

Then let no Man take offence at the ſtrictneſs and circumſpection of any who endeavour to conform themſelves to the Rule as exactly as they can; Let no Man judge ſo much Care and Circumſpection to be needleſs. Can any Man

Man be too careful where the injunctions of care, heedfulneſs, circumſpection, and watchfulneſs, are ſo many, ſo peremptory, and abſolute, and where our Concernment is ſo high and important, and that upon ſo many accounts? If any cannot bring their own Hearts to be willing to live by the Rule, and to conform to it, yet let them not condemn or cenſure others; eſpecially ſeeing the Holy Ghoſt hath noted it as a chief point of true Wiſdom thus to walk, and branded the neglect thereof with folly, as we ſhall ſee afterwards. But if any will yet be wiſe in their own Eyes, and reproach the wiſdom of God as fooliſhneſs, let them hear what God ſaith concerning ſuch; *They have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wiſdom is in them?* Whatever for the preſent they may judge of the ſtrictneſs of ſuch as endeavour to keep in the narrow way that leadeth to Life, the time is coming when they will be of another mind. When they come to ſtand before the Tribunal of Chriſt to be accountable not only for all the more notorious Irregularities and Extravagancies of their Life, but for every idle word, O then they will acknowledge that the circumſpection

Jer. 8. 9.

on and watchfulneſs which they now deride and laugh at, and look upon as folly, would have ſtood them in ſome ſtead. Then they will be convinced that the moſt circumſpect Man is the wiſeſt Man: Then they will ſay of the ſincerely pious and ſtrictly conſcientious perſon whom they now contemn, as the Author of the *Book of Wiſdom* brings them in ſpeaking; *They ſhall change their minds*, ſaith he, *and ſigh for grief of mind, and ſay within themſelves, This is he whom we ſometime had in deriſion, and in a parable of reproach. We fools thought his life madneſs, and his end without honour. How is he counted among the children of God, and his portion is among the ſaints!* Wiſd. 5. 3, 4, 5.

USE 2.

Is it the Duty of every Chriſtian to walk circumſpectly? Then how much do they fail and come ſhort of their Duty who walk at all adventures, and live by no Rule! Who regard not at all how they walk, or where they tread! This is that deſpiſing of our ways, which *Solomon* makes to be ſo dangerous and deſtructive. *He that deſpiſeth his* Pro. 19. 16.

his ways ſhall die; that is, he that is of ſo looſe, careleſs, and heedleſs a temper, that he rambles up and down like a drunken man, or a mad-man, without any conſideration or regard of his way; that minds not, conſiders not his way, whether it be ſafe or dangerous, but on he poſts with full ſpeed, through Dirt and Stones, over Bogs and Quagmires, upon Pits and Precipices, all is alike to him: He that thus lives hand over head, takes the ready courſe to deſtroy his own Soul. This is noted concerning *Jehu*, a man of a raſh and precipitant Spirit, that he took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of *Iſrael* with all his Heart. And this is a part of the Character of the ungodly man, that he caſts God's Words behind him, where it might be ſure to be out of his Eye, as not caring to look upon it, or regard it, for the regulating of his Life, and the due ordering of his Converſation thereby. Whitherſoever the impetuous violence of ſuch men's corrupt nature hurries them, thither ſpeed they without any regard either of their Duty, or of the iſſues of their ſinful courſes. *They conſider not that they do evil*, ſaith *Solomon*, *but ruſh into ſin*

2 Kin. 10. 31.

Pſa 50. 17.

Eccl. 5. 1.

ſin as the horſe ruſheth into the battle. Jer. 8. 6.
Though God be in a readineſs to meet them in their ways of ſin, and to withſtand them as an armed man, yet they go on daringly and preſumptuouſly, even running upon the *thick boſſes of his buckler*, as the foolhardineſs of ſuch raſh and bold Sinners is deſcribed *Job* 15. 26.

USE 3.

Let us all be perſwaded to walk more circumſpectly; to keep a more narrow and conſtant watch over our ſelves, and to take better heed to our ways than we have done. Now though all are concerned, highly concerned to walk circumſpectly, yet are ſome in a ſpecial manner concerned to do it above others. As,

1. They who in reſpect of their Rank and Quality, their Acquaintance and Alliances, their Callings and Imployments, are expoſed to moſt Temptations. They who neceſſarily meet with many Temptations, cannot but often offend, unleſs they be very circumſpect.

2. It concerns them above others to be circumſpect who have formerly moſt offend-

offended through their careleſneſs, their heedleſneſs, and their want of more circumſpection. How often have you been overtaken with ſin in one kind or other, which you might eaſily have avoided, if you had been circumſpect? 'Tis high time for you to reſolve to be more circumſpect for the future, who have already contracted ſo much guilt through your careleſneſs, and eſpecially if you have alſo ſmarted for your careleſs and regardleſs walking.

3. It concerns them above others to be circumſpect, who in reſpect of their Places and Stations ought to be Examples to others. Theſe are ſo much the more obliged to walk circumſpectly, becauſe elſe they become ill patterns to thoſe whoſe Eyes are upon them, and occaſions of much ſin and guilt to them.

4. It behoves them above others to walk circumſpectly who are drawing near the end of their walk; who are not far from their long home, and have little time left them to correct the manifold Errors of their Life paſt.

5. It behoves them above others to walk circumſpectly, who after more ſtrictneſs formerly have for ſome time

now

now laſt paſt taken more liberty, and walked more looſly and careleſly. For,

(1.) If theſe give not all diligence to recover themſelves, and regain what they have loſt, they will ſtill grow more remiſs and careleſs.

(2.) It would be a very ſad thing if their laſt ways ſhould be their worſt, and if death ſhould ſurprize them in a declining condition.

6. It behoves them above others to walk circumſpectly, who having been often convinced of the neceſſity and comforts of circumſpect walking, and having often reſolved on it, could never yet put their Reſolutions in practice, or at leaſt with any conſtancy go on therein. The Convictions and Reſolutions of theſe Perſons, as they do much aggravate and heighten their ſin, ſo they will much heighten and inflame their reckoning when God ſhall call them to an account.

Now in the further proſecution of this Uſe, I ſhall offer ſome Directions for walking circumſpectly; give ſome Cautions about it; and laſtly, anſwer ſuch Objections as may be made againſt it. By way of Direction for walking cir-

circumſpectly, I ſhall only mention theſe few things:

1. Keep your heart with all diligence. As the frame of your heart is, ſo for the moſt part are your actions: *From the heart are the iſſues of life.* Prov. 4. 23. Your circumſpection in the courſe of your Life hath its riſe from your keeping your heart. He that neglects his heart will never be able to order and frame his words and actions according to the rule. Wherefore be ſure that you lay the Foundation of all your circumſpection, in the heeding of your heart, and in keeping it under Government. Govern your heart well, and you govern your Tongue, and rule your hand, and the whole Man. Let the heart be once out of order, and the effects of it will ſoon appear in the unrulineſs of the Tongue, and the irregularity of your Actions. Whatſoever elſe is out of order, to be ſure the heart was firſt out of order. O how eaſie a task would it be to order all the reſt, if the heart were well ordered! O let's begin there, keeping a ſtrict and conſtant guard over it.

2. Set

2. Set God always before your Eyes, and labour to keep up lively Apprehensions of his Presence and Omniscience. How awful and circumspect would this make you! How solicitous would you be of pleasing him, and how much afraid of offending him! This constant sense of God's presence, and awe of his All-seeing Eye upon our hearts; no man that hath not had some Experience of it, can easily conceive what an influence it would have upon us to beget in us this holy circumspection. 'Tis our unmindfulness of God's Eye and Presence that makes us so heedless and unwatchful.

3. Consider all your ways, and ponder your paths, as *Solomon*'s counsel is, *Weigh your words and actions in the ballance of the sanctuary, examine them by the rule.* But let this be done most carefully and exactly when any matter of great and weighty consequence lies before you. Then be sure that you do nothing but upon sound and mature deliberation; and upon clear satisfaction, that what you do, is agreeable to the rule, and suitable to the principles of good conscience. How often doth mens precipitancy and rashness hurry them into Prov. 4. 26.

thoſe ſins, which afterwards occaſion much anguiſh and horror of Conſcience to them. So what is raſhly done in a quarter of an hour, lies grating upon their Conſciences many years after; it may be they are never fully eaſed of the burthen of it as long as they live.

4. Take heed of being ſwayed and overruled by the judgment and practice of others to a compliance with them in what your own Conſcience is not ſatiſfied to do. The Opinion and Practice of the multitude is a deceitful and crooked Rule. What the generality cry up, approve of, and applaud, concur and agree in, may be extremely evil; what is highly eſteemed among men, may be abomination in the ſight of God. And again, What men cry down, and vilify, what they make to be matter of reproach and contumely, that may be in ſuch account with God, as it may be highly accepted and rewarded. And yet ſo it is, that we are apt to place very much in the opinion and example of a multitude. What many or moſt do, what the generality of Town and Country do, that we ſtick not to do. Weak Arguments ſhall be ſtrong enough to prevail with us to be

Luk. 16. 15.

of

of the ſtronger ſide, and to concur with the multitude. Wherefore it was not without great cauſe that God gave his People a ſpecial caution againſt this weak and ſinful compliance. *Thou ſhalt not follow a multitude to do evil, neither ſhalt thou ſpeak in a cauſe to decline after many to wreſt judgment.* God ſaw our proneneſs to be influenced and ſwayed by the multitude, and to go, *non quà eundum, ſed quà itur, not in that path in which we ſhould go, but in which the greater part go.* If in any thing therefore our circumſpection be neceſſary, it is when we are aſſaulted with the temptation to warp and turn aſide out of the right way. Exod. 23. 2.

5. Be careful to keep at a diſtance from all temptations to ſin, as far as you are able. Where you foreſee they are making towards you, avoid them, run away from them: Herein lies a great part of your circumſpection. If you heedleſly and careleſly run upon temptations, and much more if you wilfully and preſumptuouſly caſt your ſelf upon them, 'tis no hard matter to foretell what the iſſue will be. No man can expect to be ſtrengthened againſt temptations, and to be ſecured againſt the

malignant influences of them, that is not careful to avoid them as far as he is able; and much less may he expect it, that wittingly and deliberately ventures on them. This man doth indeed highly provoke God to leave him to the power of temptation, that he may smart for his presumptuous folly in the end. He, and he only walks safely, that walks so circumspectly as not to come too near the borders of sin and temptations.

6. Above all, take heed of sinful intanglements. By sinful intanglements, I mean any rash ties or Engagements to do what may not be done with a good conscience. When any man is by Oath, or Promise, or any other way under an Engagement to do what is sinful, he is in the Snare of the Devil, out of which 'twill be very difficult to disintangle himself. That were a fearful case; and therefore he that loves his own Soul, and consults his innocency, and the peace of his Conscience, will be so circumspect as to beware of such intanglements.

So having done with the Directions for walking circumspectly; I now come in the next place to the Caution relating,

relating thereunto; and they are these.

1. Let not your circumspection and conscientiousness degenerate into vain scrupulosity, and needless singularity: Neither make more sins, nor more duties, than the Law of God hath made. That a Person of a tender Conscience may offend this way, both Experience shews, and the Caveat of *Solomon* against it; *Be not righteous overmuch.* Eccles. 7. 16. 'Tis certain that no man can be too strict or conscientious, too exact or punctual in performance of what is really matter of duty: the Wiseman's meaning therefore is, Be not over-scrupulous, placing sin or duty in those things in which they are not. This groundless scrupulousness is attended with several mischiefs.

1. It often exposeth men to dangers causlesly, and brings those evils upon them, which if they were better informed, they might without sin avoid.

2. It straitens them, and ties them up more than need is, and deprives them of those lawful Liberties which

they might with a good conſcience make uſe of, and enjoy.

3. It makes them apt to judge and cenſure thoſe cauſleſly and uncharitably, who lawfully, and with a good conſcience, do thoſe things, which they through miſinformation judge ought not to be done.

4. If circumſpection ſhould degenerate into vain and needleſs ſcrupulouſneſs, it would bring a reproach upon truly conſcientious ſtrictneſs, and that holy circumſpection which God requires of us Upon theſe Conſiderations, let not, I ſay, your circumſpection degenerate into vain and needleſs ſcrupuloſity, which is the firſt Caution.

2. In your circumſpect walking, be ſure that you ever lay the greateſt ſtreſs upon the greateſt matters. Take care that you be not like the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, who *would ſtrain at a gnat, but ſwallow a camel.* Make conſcience of all known Duties, even of the leaſt, of *tithing mint and cummin*; but let your chief care, and moſt ſolicitous circumſpection be exerciſed about the *weightier matters of the law.* For if while you would ſeem to be very circumſpect about

Matth. 23. 24.

bout ſmaller matters, and to make much conſcience of little things, you make no conſcience at all of far greater matters; You hereby

1. Make evident proof of your Hypocriſy unto all that obſerve your Converſation.

2. You throw dirt upon circumſpect walking, and cauſe the ſtrict and holy ways of God to be misjudged, and evil-ſpoken of.

So much concerning the 2*d* Caution.

3. Notwithſtanding your own perſonal ſtrictneſs and circumſpection, be not forward to condemn others, who in ſome things may be ſatisfied to do what you cannot. I ſay, be not forward to condemn their Perſons, much leſs their Eſtate; provided that

1. They be ſuch as otherwiſe walk unblamably as to the general courſe of their lives.

2. Provided alſo, that the things in which you are not ſatisfied to do as they do, be not clearly and undeniably againſt the Rule. I ſay, theſe things provided, be not forward to condemn

them in respect of those things in which their practice is different from your own.

4. When you have done all that you can, and framed your life with the greatest circumspection and exactness that you can possibly attain unto, look for your acceptance with God, through Christ only, *and count all things*, your best things, *loss and dung in comparison of Christ*.

So from the Cautions, I pass on to the Objections that may be made against circumspect walking. Men generally are so much for liberty, that this circumspect walking is not very acceptable to them. Many things they have to say against it; and indeed it were strange, if a course of life so contrary to our corrupt Inclinations, should not be encountred with many Objections. I shall endeavour to say something to the chief of them, that so the Prejudices that fright men away from circumspect walking, or possess their minds with misprisions or mistakes concerning it, being removed, men may be reconciled to it, or at least be perswaded to make trial of it. If they would make trial of it, their own experience would quickly unde-

undeceive them, and induce them to entertain a better opinion of it. The Objections which I ſhall ſpeak to, are theſe that follow:

Object. 1. Such a ſtrict courſe of life, ſo ſevere and circumſpect a converſation, would deprive men of all the comforts of this life, and plunge them in the depths of ſadneſs and melancholly. God in all his dealings and Providences deſigns our good and comfort; who then can imagine that he ſhould call us unto, and ingage us in ſo mopiſh and monkiſh a way?

Anſw. 'Tis a great miſtake, and a very groundleſs prejudice againſt the ways of God, to conceive them to be ſo dark and uncomfortable, becauſe there is ſuch circumſpection required of thoſe that will walk in them.

1. It muſt be here granted, that they do indeed call us off from carnal pleaſures, and from thoſe ſinful delights, concerning which, *Solomon* ſaith, that they *are madneſs*; and a kind of mirth, *the end whereof is heavineſs*. But is it to be accounted ſo great a miſery to be taken Eccleſ. 2. 2. Prov. 14. 13.

ken off, and disingaged from these deceitful Pleasures, from these dangerous and pernicious baits of sin? Is it so desirable a thing to go to Hell laughing; to be permitted to run on jollily and merrily to the Pit of Eternal Destruction, as the silly Bird, that being overjoyed at the sight of the alluring and killing Bait, gladly hasteneth to the Snare? Is there so much happiness in being at liberty, to be joyfully speeding down to the Chambers of death, as
Prov. 5. 7. *the fool* runs on singing and dancing *to the correction of the stocks?* If God be pleased to take us off from running on heedlesly and securely upon these dangerous Precipices, should we not look upon it as our happiness? Hath he reason to think himself hardly dealt with, or injured by me, from whose lips I snatch away a cup of sweet and delicious Poyson, which he is endeavouring to swallow down as greedily, as if it were a Cordial?

2. Yet is not this all. God calls us off from these killing Pleasures, that we may exchange them for better; for safe, sound and substantial Pleasures, true Delights, satisfying Contentments, durable and lasting Joys. Such are to be found

found in the ways of God; and the more any man denies himſelf, as to all ſinful Delights; the more ſtrictly, heedfully, and circumſpectly he walks, the more of theſe ſpiritual Comforts and Refreſhings may he hope to enjoy.

Obj. 2. Many of thoſe who ſeem to walk circumſpectly, and to be of a very ſtrict and ſevere converſation, ſeem to lead but heavy and uncomfortable lives. For who are more full of ſad Complaints, and inward Troubles? Who are more ſubject to doubtings and diſſatisfactions about their ſpiritual Eſtate? Who are more held under bondage through the fears of their Eternal miſcarrying, than many of theſe?

Anſ. Though all this be true, yet is this no prejudice, no juſt prejudice to circumſpect walking.

For 1*ſt*, The cauſe hereof is moſtly in themſelves, and not in the ways of God; neither is it in the leaſt to be attributed to their circumſpect walking, but rather to their not walking more circumſpectly. Their own careleſneſs, and

and want of due heed and circumſpection in their ways; their venturing on ſin, or inconſtancy and ſlothfulneſs in holy Duties, or ſome other miſcarriage, is often the true cauſe of all their troubles. Were they more circumſpect, they would be freer from troubles.

2. Sometimes their troubles ariſe from their darkneſs, and miſapprehenſions of the Covenant of Grace, and the Terms on which God offers mercy unto Sinners.

3. Sometimes their troubles ariſe from their unbelief, and from their refuſing to be comforted, and their putting off, and thruſting away from themſelves thoſe Comforts which God reacheth forth unto them.

4. Sometimes their troubles are much from the temptations of *Satan*; God for divers wiſe and gracious Ends permitting them to be ſo exerciſed. But however it be, and from what cauſe ſoever their troubles proceed, while they are in God's ways, they are in the ways of peace, and all ſhall at length end in peace.

5. In the mean time, their condition at preſent, with all its diſadvantages, is a thouſand times better than the condition

tion of thoſe who ſpend their days in ſinful Frolicks, and even glut themſelves with carnal Pleaſures, and ſenſual Delights, and ſuddenly go down to Hell, and there meet with ſo much the more torment and ſorrow, by how much they lived more voluptuouſly and deliciouſly here. O thrice miſerable is their condition, who go from their heaven of ſenſual Delights and Satisfactions here, to an eternity of Miſery and torment in the other World! And thrice happy they, who having made choice of the narrow way that leadeth unto life, through many inward troubles and fears, and much outward tribulation alſo, if need be, enter at laſt into the Kingdom of God; That bleſſed and glorious Kingdom, where all tears are wiped from their eyes, where ſorrow and ſighing ſhall flee away, and everlaſting joy ſhall be upon their heads. And ſo much in anſwer to that Objection.

Obj. 3. The God whom we ſerve is a God of mercy; *He delighteth in mercy: And his tender mercies are over all his works.* There is no Attribute of God which the Holy Scriptures do more exalt

Mich. 7. 18. Pſal. 145. 9.

alt and magnify, than his Mercy. His Mercies being ſo great, why may we not hope to find mercy with him, although we take ſome liberty, and be not ſo ſtrict and circumſpect? Can we apprehend that a God of ſo great mercy, will be ſo ſevere as to condemn us, caſt us into Hell, and expoſe us to everlaſting Torments for want of this circumſpection?

Anſ. Though the Mercies of God be exceeding great, yet ſaving mercy is not extended to all, *but reſerved for thoſe that fear him; for ſuch as keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them.* 'Tis for the truly humbled, penitent, and reformed Sinner. *He that confeſſeth his ſin, and forſaketh it, ſhall have mercy* God *ſhews mercy to them that love him, and keep his commandments.* But as for ſuch as plead God's mercy, to juſtify themſelves in their careleſs and looſe converſation, theſe muſt expect no mercy from him. God never promiſed ſaving mercy to any that are not ſo ſtrict as to make conſcience of the leaſt ſin, and ſo circumſpect as to keep a watch over themſelves, that they be not overtaken with ſin. Without ſome meaſure

Pſal. 103. 17, 18.

Prov. 28. 13.

Exod. 20. 6

ſure of this circumſpection, no man can ſatisfy himſelf touching the truth of his Repentance, without which there is no forgiveneſs, no mercy to be looked for at the hands of God. For true repentance neceſſarily includes a ſincere deſire and ſerious endeavour to relinquiſh all ſin: Now how can this ſerious and earneſt endeavour to leave all ſin, be without ſuch an holy wariness and circumſpection as that which hath been treated of? Can an uncircumſpect and careleſs perſon, that heeds not what he doth, or how he walks, that takes liberty to pleaſe himſelf, that ſticks not to run upon any temptations to ſin that lie in his way; can this perſon be thought to be one that ſeriouſly and earneſtly endeavours to forſake all ſin? Nothing leſs; he that truly deſires, and ſeriouſly endeavours to forſake Sin, will be circumſpect and watchful; if he be not, 'tis apparent that he hath no great edge againſt his Sin; there is as yet no ſuch deadly feud between him and his Sin, as is required in every true Penitent.

Obj. 4. Chriſt hath freed us from the Law, and Believers now under the Goſpel are more at liberty than formerly

ly they were. What neceſſity therefore is there of ſo much ſtrictneſs and circumſpection? How doth ſuch a ſevere courſe of Life conſiſt with the liberty that Chriſt hath purchaſed for us?

Anſ. Chriſt hath indeed freed us from any Obligation to the Ceremonial Law, and from the Moral Law as a Covenant of Works that requires perfect and unerring obedience; we are not to be juſtified by the works of the Law, but by Faith in Chriſt. But however the Moral Law is ſtill in force as the Rule of Life, and we are ſtill under the commanding power thereof. And that we are ſo, is manifeſt ſeveral ways.

Mat. 5. 17. 1. Chriſt himſelf expreſly declares, that he came *not to deſtroy the law, but to fulfil it.* And the Apoſtle, even when he diſputes againſt juſtification by the works of the Law, is ſo far from aſſerting that we are freed from the obligation of the Law, that he doth with much vehemency affirm the contrary; Rom. 3. 31. *Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid,* ſaith he; *yea we eſtabliſh the law.*

2. Our

2. Our Saviour in his preaching every where preſſeth Obedience to the Moral Law, and urgeth the Duties thereof: And in particular his moſt Divine and Excellent Sermon on the Mount doth in great part conſiſt of that ſubject.

3. In that Sermon he doth not only preſs the Duties of the Moral Law, but vindicate the Law it ſelf in many particulars, and more ſtrictly enforceth Obedience thereunto, and ſeverely threatens the Diſobedient.

4 He declares, that if our *righteouſneſs exceed not the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees*, (who yet went very far in many things) *we ſhall never enter into the kingdom of God.* Promiſing Mercy to no Sinners but ſuch as take his yoke upon them; And letting all workers of Iniquity, and wilful Tranſgreſſors of the Law know, that he will never acknowledge them for his, but utterly diſclaim them, and caſt them off at the great day of their appearance before him, notwithſtanding all their pleas and pretenſions for being owned by him. Mat. 5. 20. Mat. 11. 29 Mat. 7. 23.

5. As Chriſt himſelf ever called for Obedience to the Moral Law, and urg-

ed the Duties thereof, ſo did the Apoſtles after him. St. *Paul* in his diſcourſe
Act. 24. 25 with *Felix*, *reaſoned of righteouſneſs, and temperance, and judgment to come.* And writing to the *Corinthians*, he
1 Cor. 6. 9, 10. ſaith, *Know ye not, that the unrighteous ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abuſers of themſelves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, ſhall inherit the kingdom of God.* All which being Sins againſt the Moral Law, exclude Men out of Heaven; ſo ſtrictly doth God ſtill even now under the Goſpel inſiſt on and require Obedience to the Moral
Rom. 13. 1, 2. Law. And thus the Apoſtle preſſeth the Duty of Subjects to Magiſtrates, the Duty of Parents to Children, and
Col. 3. 18, 19, &c. of Children to Parents; as alſo the reſpective Duties of Husbands and Wives,
Col. 4. 1. Maſters and Servants. He that peruſeth theſe Scriptures, how can he think that the Moral Law is now out of date, and no longer in force to them that have embraced the Goſpel, and by Faith received Chriſt?

6. The Goſpel is ſo far from diſcharging the Profeſſors thereof from Obedience

ence to the Law, that it more ſtrongly enforceth Obedience, and lays an higher Obligation thereunto upon Chriſtians than was laid upon the Jews; in regard that greater Light, and more powerful Motives and Inducements to Obedience are now afforded. Hence thoſe ſevere and terrible threatnings in caſe of Diſobedience. *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil.* Joh. 3 19. *Now is the Ax laid to the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewen down and caſt into the fire.* Mat. 3 10. Chriſt *comes with his fan in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.* Luk. 3.17. *The Lord Jeſus ſhall be revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Goſpel.* 2 Theſ. 1 7, 8. And what doth *the grace of God* revealed in this Goſpel *teach us*, but *to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent world?* Tit. 2.11, 12.

7. Did Chriſt ever intend by his death to purchaſe for us a liberty of ſinning?

ning? Did he not therefore give *himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purifie to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works?* And lastly, on whom was the injunction of walking circumspectly here in the Text imposed? Was it not on Believers?

And this may suffice to have been spoken to that Objection.

Obj. 5. If so much heedfulness and circumspection be required of Christians, what will become of many that profess the Christian Religion? We see no great numbers of them that are so strict and circumspect; shall they all perish notwithstanding all the Priviledges which they enjoy in the visible Church, who attain not to this circumspection?

A. Our Saviour hath plainly declared, that *many are called, but few are chosen.* And again, That *wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat; and that strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* What can we say against such plain, expres, and absolute

Mat. 20. 16
Mat. 22. 14
Mat. 7. 13, 14.

abſolute paſſages of Scripture delivered by the mouth of him that is Truth it ſelf, and can neither deceive nor be deceived? A very weighty and dreadful Truth it is, that calls upon us all to give all diligence that we may be found in that ſmall number, which we are never likely to be, unleſs we walk circumſpectly. If to walk circumſpectly be a Duty incumbent on all Chriſtians, who is there amongſt us all that may think himſelf exempted from it? Who can plead for himſelf that he hath a particular Diſpenſation to lead his Life in another manner, and to go to Heaven upon eaſier terms than others may?

But perhaps you will ſay, though we are all enjoined to walk circumſpectly, and though it be a Duty incumbent on all, yet 'tis not enjoined as abſolutely neceſſary to Salvation. We may hope God intends not to ſhut all out of Heaven that have not walked circumſpectly. This were very hard.

A. I anſwer briefly, If it be a Duty to walk circumſpectly, then 'tis a Sin not ſo to walk; and every Sin unrepented of, excludes a man out of Heaven.

If any Man think this to be hard, he must know, that as hard as it is, God will never alter the terms on which Eternal Life is offered men, and frame more favourable and cheap terms to gratifie mens corrupt Affections.

Obj. 6. Many who never walked with so much circumspection, die peaceably. When they are going out of the World, we hear of no complaints, no discovery of fears, no trouble of conscience. A man would not wish to leave the World with more peace and quiet than many of these do.

A. To die without dread and horrour, or free from inward troubles and conflicts, is no certain and infallible Argument of a good Estate. Their Estate is never the better, or the more safe, because they die quietly. Their Consciences may be seared, and their Hearts may be so hardened as they may have no sense of their Spiritual condition. We find by Experience, that this is the case of many a wicked man that hath led a very lewd and ungodly life. Ask many such when they lye a dying, how 'tis with them, whether there be any thing that

that troubles them, or lyes heavy upon their Conſciences? And they will readily anſwer, There is nothing that troubles them, nothing that diſturbs their peace. Ask them, if they be willing to die, and whether they be not afraid of death? Their anſwer is, they are very willing to die; and as for death, they fear it not. Now call you this a dying peaceably and comfortably, when men of very bad or careleſs Lives go out of the World faſt aſleep in carnal ſecurity? When they die without any ſenſe of their Spiritual and Everlaſting Eſtate? O be not deceived! 'tis certainly a very ſad and fearful thing, when a careleſs or wicked Life, without any evidence of after-repentance, is ſhut up in a quiet and undiſturbed death. How much better grounds of comfortable hopes concerning the Everlaſting Eſtate of ſuch men were there, if they died under many fears and troubles from a ſound conviction and thorough ſence of the ſins of their Life! 'Tis very true, you will ſay, if they have been very wicked Men, great and notorious Sinners; But if the worſt that can be ſaid of them, is, that they have been careleſs and uncircumſpect in their Lives, the matter is not much.

A. Considering the corruption of our Nature, our strong proneness to Evil, the many Temptations we meet with, and the malice and restlesness of Satan ever watching to take hold of all advantages against us to hurry us into Sin; 'tis impossible but that a man of a careless and uncircumspect Life, should have led a very sinful Life, and have contracted and heaped up a great deal of guilt; and therefore if such a one without discovery of any After-repentance and Humiliation, and without any trouble upon account of his Sins, go quietly out of the World, 'tis a sad and uncomfortable thing; and though we may not rashly and peremptorily pass our Judgment concerning the Eternal Estate of particular Persons, yet have we just cause to fear, and all things considered, we cannot but greatly fear how it may be with such a one in the other World. Sure we are, without Repentance, whereof there was no evidence or appearance, he must everlastingly miscarry.

So from the Duty of walking circumspectly, I come to the Argument by which it is enforced, implied in the next words, *Not as fools, but as wise.* 'Tis every

every man's wiſdom to walk circumſpectly, but his folly to be careleſs, uncircumſpect and heedleſs in the courſe of his Life. *Wiſdom is before him that hath underſtanding.* That is, He that hath underſtanding, the man that is truely wiſe, his wiſdom is before him to look right on, to ponder the path of his feet, as *Solomon* ſpeaks, to ſpy out and conſider his way, to direct and govern his ſteps. And ſo is this Proverb expounded by that other to the ſame purpoſe, *The wiſdom of the prudent is to underſtand his way*; that's the uſe which he makes of his wiſdom; he is, as to that matter, wiſe for himſelf, in *Solomon*'s Language ſtill: *But the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth*; he exerciſeth that little reaſon which he hath, about remoter things, about any thing elſe rather than what moſt nearly concerns him, the obſerving and making choice of his way. As if a Man ſhould fix his Eyes on the Hills at a great diſtance, where the Earth and the Heavens ſeem to meet, and in the mean time neglect to heed his way, to obſerve where he treads, and what dangers he runs upon; as the Philoſopher who fell into a Pit whilſt his Eyes were taken up with the

Prov. 17. 24.

Prov. 4. 25, 26.

Prov. 14. 8

Prov. 9. 12

the Contemplation of the Celeſtial Bodies. Thus we ſee 'tis our wiſdom to walk circumſpectly; and 'tis ſo in ſeveral reſpects.

1. We hereby ſhun and avoid the greateſt Evils.

1. The diſpleaſure of God, whoſe wrath is ſo terrible, that it made the Pro-
Hab. 1. 6. phet cry out, *Who can ſtand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceneſs of his anger?*

2. The ſting of an evil and guilty Conſcience, the Torment whereof is
Prov. 18. 14. intolerable; *A wounded ſpirit who can bear?*

3. The loſs of a man's Soul, which nothing can compenſate or make up.
Mat. 16 26 *What ſhall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul? or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul?* He that walketh circumſpectly, avoideth theſe three great and formidable Evils, greater than which none can be; the diſpleaſure of God, the ſting of a guilty Conſcience, and the loſs of his Soul.

2. On the contrary, by walking circumſpectly, we ſecure to our ſelves the greateſt,

greateſt, the moſt deſireable good things.

1. The favour of God; for while we are with God in a courſe of Obedience, he is with us 'Tis only ſin that deprives us of God's favour. Now the *favour of God is better than life.* What is there in all the World that is comparable to it? 2 Chron. 15. 2. Pſal. 63. 3.

2. It ſecures to us peace of Conſcience. *As many as walk according to this rule, peace be upon them, and upon the Iſrael of God.* And this alſo is a thing of invaluable worth. *A good conſcience is a continual feaſt.* The comfort of which is ſo great, as none can tell what it is, but he that hath had experience of it in himſelf. *It paſſeth knowledge.* Gal. 6. 16. Prov. 14. 13. Eph. 4. 7.

3. By walking Circumſpectly, we ſecure to our ſelves the Everlaſting well-being of our Souls, which even in Satans valuation of them are more worth than the whole World. *To him that ordereth his converſation aright, will I ſhew the ſalvation of God.* Mat. 4. 9. Pſa. 50. 23.

There being theſe ſingular advantages of walking circumſpectly, you need not be much troubled at the Cenſures of the World. They who are ſtrangers to the ways

ways of God, and were never acquainted with the Comforts of them, may count them little better than Fools that run not with them to the ſame exceſs of Riot: But this is more than enough to ſatisfie and quiet you, that what they count fooliſhneſs, the Holy Ghoſt honours with the Elogy of Wiſdom.

So I have done with the great Duty of circumſpect walking, together with the reaſon by which it is enforced. I come now to ſpeak of the particular inſtance in which our circumſpection ſhould be exerciſed; *Redeeming the time.* To redeem, properly is by laying down a price to purchaſe again, or recover that which another hath gotten poſſeſſion of: So a Captive or a Slave is redeemed out of the hand of an Enemy: So a Man redeems his Goods which have been pawned or ſold to another. Now in this very ſence to redeem time that is gone is impoſſible: For time is of that nature, that it can never be recovered when once 'tis loſt. All the Gold and Silver, all the Pearls and Richeſt Treaſures in the World, were not a price ſufficient to purchaſe again, and recover one quarter of an hour when 'tis paſt: Wherefore by redeeming time, nothing

elſe

elſe can be underſtood, but a wiſe and holy improvement of the preſent time (to ſpeak vulgarly, for if we ſpeak properly and acurately, no part of time is preſent; the preſent being only an inſtant which is indiviſible.) This wiſe improvement of our time with double care and diligence, may however in an improper ſence be ſaid to be a redeeming of miſ-ſpent time that is paſt; namely, as it makes amends for that loſs. As for Example, if a Man having play'd away, and vainly loſt an hour, ſhall by extraordinary induſtry ſo improve the next hour as to diſpatch the work of two hours therein, he may be ſaid to have redeemed the hour that was loſt. And ſeeing the Apoſtle in this place intends the redeeming of time for heavenly things, (at leaſt principally, if not ſolely) as the whole ſeries of his diſcourſe ſhews, and not the redeeming it for the things of the World; if time be ſometimes gained and improved for heavenly things with ſome inconvenience or prejudice to our ſelves in Temporals, then we redeem it in a ſence not very improper; for the inconvenience or prejudice that we ſuſtain in Temporal things, is as it were the price

that

that we lay down to redeem it. But we need not be too Critical or Accurate in explaining a phraſe where the Apoſtles ſenſe and meaning is obvious and eaſie to be underſtood. Without all queſtion his intention in the expreſſion of redeeming time, is only this, that we ſhould ſo wiſely and carefully husband and imploy it for our Spiritual advantage, as we may make the moſt of it toward the furthering of our Salvation; and ſuffer as little of it as is poſſible to be ſo laid out as no benefit may thence accrue to our Souls. And in regard 'tis no eaſie matter thus to improve our time for Spiritual things, there being ſo many things of an inferior nature that will be continually putting in for a ſhare in our time, and rob us of it; therefore the Apoſtle makes the redeeming of time for Spiritual ends and purpoſes, one main thing in which our Circumſpection ſhould be exerciſed; *See that ye walk circumſpectly, redeeming the time.* Thus we have the Scope of the Apoſtle before us: They are not Temporal, but Spiritual and Heavenly things chiefly, of which the Apoſtle is here diſcourſing; for theſe better and more excellent things we are exhorted to redeem the time,

time, that is, to make the beſt improvement of it which by our greateſt Care and Circumſpection we can, and this ſometimes even by undergoing ſome loſs and prejudice in other things. In diſcourſing of this Subject, keeping as near the phraſe in the Text as I can, I ſhall ſhew,

1. From what we muſt redeem the time.
2. For what we muſt redeem it.
3. How time is to be redeemed.
4. Why 'tis to be redeemed.

And then make Application of what ſhall have been delivered.

I begin with the firſt of theſe; from what muſt we redeem time?

I anſwer, we muſt redeem it from all thoſe things that would ſeize it, and rob us of it. I ſhall mention ſome of them.

1. We muſt redeem time from the World. The World, if we affect it immoderately, and purſue the things thereof eagerly, will ingroſs to it ſelf, and ſwallow up all our time, leaving us none

none for better things, and things of higher Concernment to us.

2. We must redeem time from the Flesh. The Flesh is also craving as well as the World; it would have all our time if it might, to be spent in what may gratifie Corrupt Nature; in sleep, and ease, and pastimes, and idleness; in pleasing the Senses, and pampering the Body, and giving satisfaction to Men's Lusts.

3. We must redeem the time from Satan, who will likewise cheat us of it, and find out such imployment for it, as no part of it may be gained for our Souls, if he can hinder it. Under these three, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, may be comprehended all those things which so take up and steal away our time, as that our greatest and most important work hath the least part of it, if any part at all.

And so much concerning the first particular, from what we must redeem the time.

2. For what must time be redeemed? I answer, we must redeem the time for all those great ends and purposes for which our time here is allotted us.

As

As 1*ſt*. To attend upon the buſineſs of our lawful Callings, and to ſerve God and our Generation in the reſpective places and ſtations in which God hath ſet us. And here evey man is to conſider what that work is which God hath aſſigned him; what his proper buſineſs and imployment is about which God hath ſet him; and he muſt be very circumſpect and careful that he do not ſuffer needleſs divertiſements, and impertinent things to take him off from that work. And he muſt know, that he doth ſerve God in that work, as well as in Prayer, or any other ſpiritual Duty whatſoever. Only, great care muſt be taken

1. That in thoſe his imployments he do what he doth in obedience to God, and with reſpect to his command who hath enjoined him to be diligent and induſtrious in his Calling; and that he eye God therein, and aim at pleaſing him, and at being accepted with him; *doing every thing as unto the Lord, and not unto men*, as the Apoſtle exhorts. Coloſſ. 3. 23.

2. He muſt alſo be careful that he be not ſo intent upon the World, or any worldly thing, as to neglect his Soul,

and the Duties that pertain to God's immediate Worſhip.

Neither may it here be thought needleſs, that men ſhould be called upon to redeem time for the duties of their particular Callings. For though many are too buſie that way, devoting their whole time to the World; yet many others ſhamefully neglect their Callings, and ſuffer themſelves to be drawn off from their buſineſs by every divertiſement that comes in their way, and offers it ſelf. How well were it for many, if they could be perſuaded to redeem time from the Alehouſe, from the Tavern, from the Coffee-houſe, for the duties of their Calling; to redeem time from their lewd Acquaintance, and idle Companions; from their wicked Complices and Aſſociates in ſin! Through their neglect to redeem and improve their time better, their poor Families may be half ſtarved at home, while they waſte their time in exceſs and lewdneſs abroad. I am apt to hope the Magiſtrates will do what they can to prevent or redreſs theſe lamentable Diſorders, unto which there were never more temptations than in theſe our days there are.

2. Time

2. Time muſt be redeemed for prayer, reading the Scriptures, meditation on heavenly things, ſelf-examination, communing with your heart, and taking an account of your life. Theſe are the things, and others of like nature, for which eſpecially we are to redeem time, and which the Apoſtle chiefly aims at in this place, as hath been ſaid.

3. Time muſt be redeemed for performance of the duties and offices of love to our Neighbours, whether they be ſuch as concern their Souls, or their Bodies.

1. With relation to their Souls, time muſt be redeemed for teaching, inſtructing, counſelling, adviſing, comforting, admoniſhing and reproving them, as there ſhall be cauſe for it, and as their conditions ſhall require it.

2. With relation to their Bodies, time muſt be redeemed for looking after them, providing for them, and miniſtring ſuch reliefs and ſuccours to them as they ſhall ſtand in need of. But above all, time muſt be redeemed for our own Souls, and for the things that refer to our ſpiritual and everlaſting welfare.

3. How is the time to be redeemed?

A. By using our utmost diligence to make the best improvement of it that we can. And for our help and furtherance therein, it will concern us

1. To be careful that we rightly divide and distribute our time; allotting such a proportion of it for attending the duties of our particular Callings, so much for necessary refreshings, so much for holy duties, and so for the rest of those things which necessarily require some part of our time.

2. To be ever watchful against all Incroachers upon our time, and the principal Thieves of our time, which will be every day attempting to steal away some part of it. What these Thieves of time are, every one best knows, who is best acquainted with his own Temptations, and the circumstances of his Condition.

3. He should daily call himself to an account, and enquire how he hath imployed his time, and what use he hath made of it. And where he finds he hath mispent any part of it, he should be humbled for it, and resolve to make amends

amends by greater care in husbanding his time for the future. And this he ſhould eſpecially be careful to do, where through his careleſneſs he hath miſimployed, or vainly ſquandred away that time which ſhould have been ſpent in the Service of God, and in the Duties that more immediatly refer to his Soul, and more directly tend to the promoting of the good thereof.

But you will ſay, If a man ſhould every day thus reckon with himſelf, and call himſelf to an account concerning the imploying of every part of his time, this would be a very irkſome and tedious courſe. Who would endure to be ſo ſtrict and ſevere to himſelf, as to be accountable to himſelf for every hour in the day? This were an intolerable burthen, a yoke too heavy to be born. To this I anſwer,

1. That whether we be willing to be accountable to our ſelves for our time daily, or no, we muſt be accountable to God for it, for every hour of it. And the beſt way to render our Account to God more eaſie, is to be daily calling our ſelves to an account. He that doth this, and doth it as he ought, makes

even Reckonings between God and his own Soul every day.

2. We may not think to get to Heaven ſo eaſily, as to undergo nothing in our way thither that may be tedious and unacceptable to our corrupt Nature. They who may hope to go to Heaven, muſt deny themſelves, and croſs the ſinful Inclinations of their Nature; they muſt ever and anon be rigid and ſevere to themſelves; they muſt be willing to take pains, and *to ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate. They muſt give all diligence to make their calling and election ſure. Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto thoſe things which are before, they muſt preſs towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God.* If men dream of getting to Heaven without labour and difficulty, without offering ſome violence to their depraved and ſinful Natures, they are not likely to come thither. Undoubtedly 'tis not for nothing that our Saviour hath declared, *That narrow is the way, and ſtrait is the gate that leadeth unto life.* 'Tis a ſevere paſſage that we have; and deſerving to be ſeriouſly conſidered by all ſlothful Chriſtians, that would go to Heaven ſo as it might coſt them nothing;

Luk. 13. 24.
2 Pet. 1. 10.
Phil. 3. 13, 14.
Matth. 7. 14.

thing; *If the righteous ſcarcely be ſaved, where ſhall the ungodly and ſinner appear?* 1 Pet. 4. 18. If the moſt righteous man after all the care and diligence which he hath uſed, and the pains which he hath taken to ſecure his Soul, be ſcarce ſaved at laſt; if all that he could do, be but juſt enough to bring him to Heaven, ſhall any man think to loiter away his time here, and waſt it as he pleaſeth, and yet make account to get to Heaven as well as thoſe who have been moſt careful and ſollicitous, moſt diligent and induſtrious in the uſe of all good means, to prevent the everlaſting miſcarrying of their Souls? *Let no man ſo deceive himſelf; whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he reap:* As men have been ſollicitous and diligent, or careleſs and ſlothful, about the concernments of their Souls here, ſo muſt they expect to fare hereafter. *They that ſow to the fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption; And they that ſow to the ſpirit, ſhall of the ſpirit reap life everlaſting.* Gal. 6. 7. 8.

But you will ſay, My Condition is ſuch, that how careful ſoever I be about what concerns my Soul, I can redeem but a very little time for things of that nature. My particular Calling ſo con-

tinually takes me up, that I can hardly gain one quarter of an hour in a day from it to be ſpent upon any thing elſe. I anſwer,

1. This may ſometimes be through a man's own fault. Perhaps he takes more upon him, and incumbers himſelf with more buſineſs than he ought. No man ſhould ſo intangle himſelf with the Affairs of this World, as to ſhut out better things. Better let part of the World go, than indanger the loſs of your Soul. By ſo graſping the World, as to loſe your Soul, you would be a ſorry gainer in the end.

2. But ſuppoſing a man's Calling to be ſuch, as very little time can be redeemed from it for heavenly things; yet he muſt remember, *that one thing is needful*; abſolutely and indiſpenſably neceſſary, and therefore he muſt find time for that one great thing, whatever elſe be omitted. Earthly things muſt ſo far give way to heavenly things, as that our Souls and eternal concernments be not neglected.

Luke 10. 42.

3. But yet however it muſt be conſidered, That God doth not require the ſame portion of time from all men. Perſons

ſons whoſe Condition is low and ſtrait, as to outward things; and ſome others alſo, whoſe time is neceſſarily and unavoidably taken up with the duties of their particular Calling, may ſatisfy themſelves in allowing much leſs time for ſpiritual things, than others who are leſs ſtraitned, and more at liberty. But as for ſuch as have more leiſure, they may not think that no more is expected of them, than of the other; *For to whom much is given, of them much ſhall be required.* Luke 12. 48.

And if any have ſo much time to ſpare, as they know not how to imploy it, they muſt know that God will take it ill at their hands, unleſs they meaſure to him in ſome proportion according to what they have. If they who ſo abound in time, ſhould think to put off God with a ſmall pittance of it, this were,

1. A great ſlighting of God, and would be ſo interpreted by him. *He is a great king*, and will accordingly be treated by his Subjects. Mal. 1. 14.

2. It were a great undervaluing of his Grace, as if it were either ſo cheap a commodity, as that it might be obtained

tained at any rate, and with leſs pains than any thing elſe that is of any value; or ſo vile and worthleſs a thing, as that time were ill beſtowed in labouring after it.

3. It were a great undervaluing of our own Souls; as if we thought ſo meanly of them, that we grudged any time that is beſtowed on them.

4. As for thoſe, who in reſpect of their Callings, and the imployments in which the Providence of God hath ingaged them, are much ſtraitned in time, and cannot help it; I ſhall recommend theſe three things to them.

1. The leſs time they can redeem from their Callings for holy Duties, the more heavenly-minded let them labour to be while they follow their Imployments; ſetting God much before their eyes in the duties of their Calling; endeavouring to keep a good Conſcience, and to carry themſelves juſtly and uprightly in all their dealings; and upon all occaſions throughout the day ſending up many ſhort, but fervent, Prayers, and holy Ejaculations unto God. So doing, they may reſt aſſured, that they ſerve God acceptably in the Duties of their

their Calling, and ſhall accordingly be both accepted and rewarded. An inſtance hereof we may ſee, *Coloſſ.* 3. 24. *Eph.* 6. 8.

2. The leſs time they have for holy Duties, the more careful muſt they be, that the little time they have be not loſt in a ſlight, careleſs, formal and heartleſs performance of holy Duties. Having but little time for ſuch things, let them be ſure they make the moſt of it by a truly ſpiritual improvement of it.

3. The leſs time they can redeem from their Callings in the week time, the more careful let them be to ſpend the Lord's Day in a due manner, and ſo as may beſt conduce to their ſpiritual advantage. To be able to gain very little time from their Callings throughout the week, and alſo to ſpend the Lord's Day either in idleneſs or paſtimes, or in the meer outward formalities of Worſhip, void of all ſpiritual life and power, were the ready way to ſtarve your Souls. Such as do this, if they had any true grace, muſt needs be ſenſible of the continual decays and declinings thereof, unleſs they be thoſe that never reflect upon themſelves, and take any account of the ſtate of their Souls.

And

And ſo much touching the third particular, how time is to be redeemed.

4. Why is time to be redeemed? There are many reaſons for it; but I ſhall here mention only ſome of them, reſerving the reſt to be after mentioned in the Application. We muſt redeem the time,

1. Becauſe 'tis a Talent for which we muſt give an account. Time is lent us, and put into our hands not to be waſted and trifled away as we pleaſe, but to be managed and imployed, to be laid out and expended according to the pleaſure of him who hath intruſted us with it. Wherefore our Account will be ſad, if when we ſhall be called to give it in, it ſhall appear that we have neglected the Work, for the diſpatching whereof time was allotted us, and ſpent our time in that which was no part of our buſineſs.

2. We muſt redeem the time, becauſe our chief and moſt neceſſary work is limited to a certain time, the time of this our temporal life here. Our moſt neceſſary and important work here, is to make our peace with God, and

and get a title through Chriſt to a better life when this ſhall be at an end. Now this work muſt be done here, or never; the other World is no place for it. *Now is the accepted time, now is the day of ſalvation.* Mercy is here offered, and we are called on, and importuned to accept of it; but after this life, the door of mercy will be for ever ſhut. 2 Cor. 6. 2.

3. The continuance and duration of the time allotted us for this great work, is in ſundry reſpects very uncertain.

1. The life of man is uncertain. No man knows how near he may be to his long home. This may be the laſt day, this the laſt hour that he hath to live, for ought that he can tell. Who can give him any ſecurity for the lengthening out of his life one hour more? *Our times are in God's hand. When he pleaſeth he takes away our breath, and we return to the duſt.* And he hath not thought fit to reveal or declare when, or how he will do it; he hath given us no aſſurance that he will not put an end to our days before we go out of this place. Pſal. 31. 15. Pſal. 104. 29.

2. If life be continued, 'tis uncertain whether or no the means of grace ſhall be continued. Though God lengthen out

out mens lives, yet he often withdraws the means of grace from them; and he hath threatned to do it, where means are not improved, and where men walk unſuitably to them. Thus he threatned
Matth. 21. 43. the *Jews* for their ſins, *to take away his kingdom from them, and to give it to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* And to the ſame effect Chriſt threatned
Rev. 2. 5. the Church of *Epheſus*, ſaying, *Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the firſt works, or elſe I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candleſtick out of his place.*

3. Though life and outward means of grace ſhould be continued, yet God may in wrath ſuſpend or withdraw the co-operation of his Spirit. Though the *Jews* enjoyed the miniſtry of the Prophet *Iſaiah*, and he muſt prophecy to them, yet God tells him before-hand, that the iſſue of all his Labours among them would be no other than the hardning
Iſa. 6. 9, 10. of them in their ſins. *Go*, ſaith he, *tell this people, hear ye indeed, but underſtand not; ſee ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and ſhut their eyes, leſt they ſee with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and underſtand with their heart,*

and

and convert, and be healed. The meaning is, Though God gave his Servant a command to propheſy to them, yet for their former ſins and provocations he would ſo give them up to the wickedneſs of their own hearts, that they would be never the better, but the worſe, for having had a Prophet among them. A fearful thing, when thoſe means that ſhould open mens eyes, ſhall ſhut them; and when thoſe means that ſhould ſoften mens hearts, ſhall harden them. Let us take heed that this be not the caſe of any of us. If what ſhould convince, humble and reform us, take no other effect upon us, but that we are ſo much the worſe, the more remote from repentance, the more obſtinately and reſolutely bent after our ſinful courſes, the more incorrigible and irreclaimable, our Charge would be heavy when the day of reckoning comes. How dreadful and intolerable would the Sentence of Condemnation to be pronounced againſt us be, when the means we have enjoyed ſhall riſe up in judgment againſt us, and our mercies ſhall condemn us!

4. As the moſt neceſſary and important work that we have to diſpatch, is limi-

limited to a certain time, and the duration of that time is in divers reſpects very uncertain; ſo not to have improved that time, but to have left our greateſt buſineſs undone, till it be too late, and till the only ſeaſon in which it was to be done, be now over, and irrecoverably gone, is a moſt deplorable and diſmal thing. How affectionately did our Saviour weep over *Jeruſalem* in this reſpect; ſaying, *If thou hadſt known, even thou in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.* When mercy was offered her, and ſhe was earneſtly importuned to accept of it, *ſhe did not know the day of her viſitation*, as it follows, *v.* 44. She ſlighted mercy, and refuſed the gracious tenders thereof.

Luke 19. 41, 42.

But wherein doth the miſery of ſuch a condition lie?

I anſwer, in theſe three things.

1. Having finally refuſed mercy, having obſtinately perſiſted in the refuſal of it to the end, they ſhall never have the like offers any more. The day of grace with them is run out once for all, and ſhall never, never be recalled; no more opportunities of making their peace

peace with God to eternity. The united Prayers of all the Saints in the Church Militant and Triumphant, if they ſhould all join together in ſuch a Suit, could not obtain the offer of mercy for the ſpace of one hour for any finally impenitent Sinner. He hath ſinned away his mercies, and 'tis utterly impoſſible that he ſhould recover what he hath wilfully deprived himſelf of: Lament his loſs he may, and rue it he ſhall to eternity, but retrieve it he never ſhall.

2. Another thing in which the miſery of this condition lies, is, that the puniſhment of ſuch perſons ſhall be dreadfully heightened upon the account of the mercy that hath been offered them, which they have ſo wretchedly ſlighted and rejected. The Goſpel it ſelf fully and clearly repreſents to us what a direful aggravation of their puniſhment this will be. We have three ſevere and moſt remarkable Scriptures to this purpoſe. *This is the condemnation*, that is, the moſt ſore and dreadful condemnation, *that light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil.* *Wo unto thee Corazin, wo unto thee Bethſaida; It* Joh. 3. 19. Mat. 11. 21, 22, 23, 24.

ſhall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And thou Capernaum that art lifted up to heaven (namely in the means of grace which ſhe enjoyed, but improved not) *Thou Capernaum which art lifted up to heaven, ſhalt be brought down to hell; it ſhall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day judgment, than for thee.*

Heb. 2. 3. *How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?*

3. The laſt aggravation of their miſery, is this, That the thoughts of mercy once offered and rejected, and of their having wilfully made themſelves eternally miſerable, when they were in a capacity of being eternally happy, if they had not ſtood in their own light, and been wanting to themſelves; I ſay, the thoughts hereof will be in their Conſciences a never-dying Worm to torment them with unſpeakable anguiſh to eternity. So diſmal and deplorable a thing it is not to have improved the time and opportunities afforded us for making our peace with God.

And ſo much concerning the Reaſons why we muſt redeem the time.

I now

I now proceed to the Application, which was the laſt thing to be ſpoken to. And here,

USE 1.

1. If Time be upon ſo many accounts to be redeemed, to be redeemed (eſpecially) for heavenly things, and to be improved for the good of our Souls; what may they think of themſelves, who make little other uſe of their time, than to diſhonour God, debauch their Acquaintance and Companions in ſin, and to bring ſwift ruin and deſtruction upon their own Souls? who redeem time indeed, but 'tis for the ſatisfaction of their Luſts, for gratifying their Corruptions, for glutting themſelves with ſinful Pleaſures, and ſenſual Delights, for heaping up ſin upon ſin, for filling up the meaſure of their Provocations, and making themſelves ripe for judgment. That ſpend their time in exceſs and intemperance, in riot and drunkenneſs, in chambering and wantonneſs; in ſetting their mouths againſt Heaven, in belching out horrid Oaths and Blaſphemies, in ſcoffing at Religion, and deriding Piety; that make it

their buſineſs to ſow the Principles of Atheiſm, and to ſcatter the Seeds of Irreligion and Profaneneſs in all Places and Companies where they come; to ſeduce, poiſon and corrupt all they meet with, *and to make them twofold more the children of hell than themſelves.* O how many ſuch wicked Inſtruments, ſuch Agitators for Hell, and Factors for the Devil, have our times produced! How doth City and Countrey abound with them! and what ſwarms of them are there to be found in all Quarters of the Land!

Though ſuch as theſe come ſeldom to the Houſe of God, yet in regard they ſometimes drop in amongſt others; and in regard that no Congregation (if numerous at leaſt) can be preſumed to be without many lewd and vicious Perſons, though perhaps there may not be many that have arrived at the ſame height and exceſs of wickedneſs with thoſe before-mentioned:

I ſhall propoſe theſe three Queſtions to all thoſe who ſpend their precious time in lewd and ungodly Practiſes, of what kind ſoever; or rather, I ſhall deſire they would propoſe them to themſelves.

1. Let

1. Let them ask themſelves, put the queſtion to their own Hearts and Conſciences, Whether they think, or can think, that God made them, and gave them excellent and immortal Souls to theſe ends? If they think he did, then it ſeems they are of opinion, that God gave them a being, to the end they might renounce their homage, and diſclaim their ſubjection to him, and ſerve the Devil: And that he ſtill preſerves them, upholds them in their being, to no other purpoſe, than that they may ſtill go on in the ſame ways of open rebellion againſt himſelf, and defiance againſt Heaven. Certainly it were an high diſparagement, and an horrid derogation to the wiſdom and holineſs of God, for any man to imagine that God ſhould make men, give them a being, continue being to them, and lengthen out their lives, that they might thus run out their time, and ſpend their days in a courſe of conſtant oppoſition and defiance againſt him that made them. Well then, you muſt be enforced to acknowledge, if you conſider the matter, that God gave you being, and allots you time here for other purpoſes than thoſe to which you apply it.

2. Ask your ſelves alſo whether you think there is no account to be given unto God of your time? If you allow your Servant time for diſpatching the work which you have injoined him, and you find the work undone when you come to view it, you call him to account for the time you gave him, and will know how he hath imployed it; whether he hath ſpent it in idleneſs, or what is worſe; and do you think that God will not have an account from you of your time? Will he be leſs ſevere and exact in reckoning with you for your time, than you are in reckoning with your Servant for it?

3. Ask your ſelf one queſtion more, to wit, Whether you think that ſtill going on at this rate as you do, you ſhall be able with comfort to give up your account hereafter to God of the uſe you have made of your time? A true and juſt account muſt be given in whether you will or no; and how then will your account run, and what will the ſtyle of it be? So much of your time ſpent in Drinking, and Carouſing, and Swearing; ſo much in Chambering and Wantonneſs, and in whatever is not to be named; ſo much in Profane and Atheiſtical

theiſtical Drolleries, and in making a mock of Sin, yea, of Piety, Religion, and Sobriety; ſo much in traducing and reproaching others, in impairing their Reputation, and wounding their good Name; ſo much in railing, fomenting and ſpreading evil Reports; ſo much in ſpeaking againſt your Brother, and ſlandering your own Mothers Son; ſo much in labouring to Infect, Poyſon, and ſeduce your Friends and Acquaintance, and to ingage them in the ſame vitious and ungodly practices with your ſelf: What think you of ſuch a Bill as this? Do you not even tremble at the thought of giving in to God ſuch an account of your time? If *Jezebel* was ſeverely threatned becauſe ſpace being given her to repent, *ſhe repented not*; What ſhall be their doom, who having ſpace given them to repent, do not only neglect to repent, but conſume, and laviſhly miſ-ſpend the whole time allotted them for that Duty, in all manner of wicked and abominable practices? And ſo much of that firſt Uſe.

USE 2.

If time be upon ſo many accounts to

be redeemed, and if it muſt be redeemed (eſpecially) for heavenly things, then what may they think of themſelves who trifle away their time vainly and fruitleſly? Who, inſtead of redeeming the time, ſtudy and contrive how they may be rid of it upon any terms. Time is a burthen to them, they know not what to do with it. They are at ſome pains in deviſing and inventing Arts to paſs it away. As if time ſtayed too long with them, and did not run out faſt enough of it ſelf. Now as for you that have ſo much time to ſpare, that are ſo much troubled with it, and know not how to beſtow it, or diſpoſe of it; let me put theſe queſtions to you alſo.

1. Have you done your great work? Have you made your peace with God? Have you gotten the pardon of your Sins? 'Tis very much to be feared, that ſuch as are thus troubled to know how to paſs away their time, and ſpend it ſo vainly, have done little towards that great and weighty buſineſs.

2. Do you know the greatneſs and difficulty of this work? Do you know how much time it may require? Tho' you

you ſhould begin to ſet about it immediately, and uſe your utmoſt diligence about it, yet ſeeing you have ſo long delayed it, and put it off; ſeeing you have undervalued and ſlighted the offers of Mercy, God may juſtly make you wait long before you be upon good grounds ſatisfied touching your peace with him.

3. Do you know how ſhort the remainder of your time may be? Do you know how ſoon death may ſurprize you, and how few ſteps there may be between you and the Grave? You cannot tell but that this may be the laſt day that you have to live, and that to morrow your Soul may be in another World, and ſo beyond all poſſibility of making your peace with God.

4. Do you conſider how different your Thoughts and valuation of Time may be when you come to die, from what they now are? Then you may ſo value it, as you may be willing to give the whole World, if you had it, to purchaſe one day, to purchaſe a few hours, to obtain, if it be poſſible, the forgiveneſs of your ſins *before you go hence and be ſeen no more*, before your Soul bid

an

an everlasting farewel to all things under the Sun, and enter upon Eternity.

5. Do you consider the high and everlasting consequence of your imploying your time while you are here? Do you consider that your endless and unspeakable happiness or misery depends on the improving or not improving of this Moment of your abode here? For a Moment 'tis, and no other in comparison of Eternity. Assuredly if these things were throughly pondered, you would not count time so cheap and inconsiderable a thing, that you should contrive and cast about how to send it going as fast as you can.

USE 3.

If we must redeem the time, and if we must redeem it especially for heavenly things, then how much are they to be blamed, who devote all their time to the World, the World they wholly mind, the World they pursue, the World so fills their hands and their heads thas there is no room left for heavenly things. But how is it, that Men who know they have Immortal Souls, should act

act so irrationally, and steer their course so directly contrary to their highest Interest? A Man would think it were easie to convince men of their Folly herein, and to reason them out of it. For,

1. Is men's Temporal welfare to be preferred before their Eternal well-being? Is the World more to them than their Souls? What comparison is there between them? *What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* Mark 8.36

2. What are the things of the World in pursuit whereof you are so much taken up? Are they any better than so much *thick Clay*, if compared with heavenly things? Are they not vile, worthless, contemptible things in comparison of the pardon of your sins, the favour of God, Grace, Holiness, an Interest in Christ, and through him a Title to Eternal Happiness in the other World? Are not these things, and these only the *true Riches?* Hab. 2. 6. Luke 16. 11.

3. Are not the best, the surest, the most stable of all earthly things *uncertain?* Do they not suddenly *make them wings,* 1 Tim. 6. 17. Prov. 23. 5

wings, and flee away as an Eagle towards heaven?

4. Though there were the richeſt confluence of them, and though a man did even wallow in them, would they ever be able to make his Life comfortable, truely comfortable, without the favour of God, and peace of Conſcience? Hath not *Solomon*, who knew how to eſtimate them, pronounced them all Vanity, *vanity of vanities*, yea *vanity and vexation of ſpirit?* Inſtead of making men truly happy, do they not wound and *pierce them through with many ſorrows*, who greedily covet after them, and ſet their hearts upon them?

Eccl. 1. 2. Ver. 14.

1 Tim. 6. 10.

5. Can they ſtand you in any ſtead in an evil day? *Solomon* again tells you, *Riches profit not in the day of wrath.*

Prov. 11. 4

6. However it be, though theſe things ſhould ſtill continue with you, yet you cannot always continue with them to enjoy them; though they ſhould not leave you, yet you muſt ſhortly leave them, be rent away from them all, and go *naked out of the world.*

Job 1. 20.

And ſo much may ſuffice to have been ſpoken to theſe three ſorts of people

ple that ſo ill beſtow their time, which ought to have been redeemed for better purpoſes; ſuch as ſpend their time wickedly, ſuch as ſpend it vainly, and ſuch as ſuffer the World to ſwallow it up, and devour it.

USE 4.

Now in the laſt place, let us all labour to be humbled for the loſs of our time, and be careful to husband it better for the future.

1. Let us labour to be humbled for the loſs of our time. And O how much time have we all loſt, even thoſe of us who ſeem to have been moſt careful to improve it!

1. How much time hath been ſpent idlely! How much hath run out fruitleſly while we yielded to, and gratified our lazy and ſlothful Nature!

2. How much in impertinent and unprofitable Viſits, that ſignified nothing, that were not in the leaſt improved to the benefit of our own or other mens Souls, or to any other real advantage of our ſelves or them!

3. How

3. How much in dreſſing and adorning the Body, in decking and beautifying that corruptible part which muſt ſhortly be Meat for Worms!

4. How much hath been ſpent in vain thoughts, idle phanſies, fruitleſs projectings, diſtruſtful cares! How much of our time by day and by night have theſe impertinencies eaten up and devoured!

5. How much of our time hath paſſed away in unprofitable talk, in empty and frothy diſcourſes, and too often in unſavoury and corrupt communication!

6. How much hath been ſpent in Gaming and Paſtimes, in needleſs Recreations and Divertiſements!

7. How much in pampering the Body, and gratifying the Fleſh with ſenſual Pleaſures!

8. How much of that part of our time which we think to have been beſt imployed, I ſay, how much of that hath been laid out on things of leſs concernment to us, while our higheſt concernments have been ſhamefully neglected! How careful have many of us been about our worldly buſineſs, that no time or opportunities for temporal advantages might be loſt, while the one thing

thing needful hath been leaſt minded! O how few hours in a Week, or perhaps in a Month have we redeemed for ſecret Prayer, Self-examination, and communing with our own hearts, for ſtating matters aright between God and our own Souls! How few hours have we redeemed for ſeeking God, and making Interceſſion for a ſinful Nation! How few for turning away the wrath of God that hangs over our heads, and for averting of thoſe heavy Judgments which our horrid provocations deſerve, and daily threaten us with! I ſay, we have all very much cauſe to be humbled, that while we have ſuffered poor and inconſiderable things to ſteal away, and to inhance ſo much of our time, theſe great and important matters have had ſo ſmall a ſhare of it.

2. Let us all be ſtirred up to improve our time better for the future, redeeming as much of it as we can for the purpoſes before-mentioned relating to the good of our own and other mens Souls, and to the preſent ſad condition of the Kingdom. And the more effectually to provoke us hereunto; let us,

1. Lay

1. Lay before us that which hath been laſt ſpoken of; let us conſider how much time we have already miſ-ſpent, ſome in one kind, and ſome in another. I ſcarce know what ſtronger motive can be made uſe of to prevail with us to redeem the time than this. Having miſſpent and loſt ſo much time already, doth it not highly concern us to make better uſe of what remains? Eſpecially if we likewiſe conſider, that as we have miſ-ſpent much time already, ſo we know not how little remains to be better imployed.

2. Conſider, that when you have been as good an husband of your time as 'tis poſſible, yet it cannot be but that much of it muſt have been loſt, notwithſtanding all the care that hath been taken to prevent the loſs of it. Much of our time runs out in ſleep, much in eating and drinking, and other ways of neceſſary refreſhing; much in thoſe unavoidable divertiſements which every day we meet with. How much of our time do theſe things take up! Certainly the far greater part of every four and twenty hours is thus imployed, unleſs we be more provident than moſt men are, yea unleſs we be extraordinary husbands

husbands of time, and rare patterns of the well-managing and improving thereof.

3. Hereunto add the motive in the Text; *Let us redeem the time, becauſe the days are evil.* And evil they are both in reſpect of the evil of Sin, and the many Temptations thereunto; and in reſpect of the evil of Affliction and Puniſhment which our Sins either have already brought upon us, or threaten us with.

1. The days are evil in reſpect of Sin, and the many Temptations thereunto. Never did, as I think, Sin more abound, than in theſe our days; never was it more ſhameleſs and impudent; never was there, I think, a greater deluge of wickedneſs in City and Country, conſidering what means there are to prevent it: And never were there ſo many temptations to Sin, what by Seducers that compaſs Sea and Land to make Proſelytes, Proſelytes to *Rome*, and Proſelytes to I know not how many pernicious Sects, in great part created and fomented by Factors for *Rome*, and ſet a work and imployed by them; and what by other Inſtruments which the Devil hath in all places to de-

bauch men, and make them Atheiſts in Opinion, or in Life and Converſation; either practical or ſpeculative Atheiſts, or both. Was there ever ſuch an Atheiſtical Age as ours is, when ſo many eſpouſe and avow Atheiſm, when they bluſh not openly to profeſs it, when they plead for it, when they diſpute for it, when they do all they can to ſpread and propagate it; and when ſo many more live like perfect Atheiſts, frame their lives no otherwiſe than they would or could do, if they verily believed that there is neither God nor Devil, neither Heaven nor Hell? O the ſad condition of our Age! that a Nation that hath had the light of the Goſpel ſo long, and ſo clearly ſhining amongſt them; that hath been, as it were, lifted up to Heaven in the means of Grace, and that hath been honoured and dignified with ſo many ſignal Deliverances, by which God hath from Heaven born witneſs, and given teſtimony to the Truth which we profeſs, ſhould, after all this, ſo wretchedly apoſtatize and decline both in Opinion and Practice, in Doctrine and Manners! In reſpect of Sin and Temptations our days are evil with a witneſs; ſo evil, that 'tis not eaſie to con-

conceive how they can be much worſe, or what further degrees of wickedneſs men can arrive at.

2. The days are evil in reſpect of the evil of Affliction and Puniſhments which our Sins have brought upon us, and further threaten us with.

1. They are evil days in reſpect of the Afflictions and Puniſhments which our Sins have brought upon us. What Effuſion of Blood at home and abroad, by Sea and by Land! What vaſt expence of Treaſure! What weakning and impairing of mens Eſtates! What Mortality in our memory by a moſt grievous and terrible Peſtilence raging in the Metropolis, and in divers other parts of the Kingdom! What dreadful Fires in the Head City, and in many other places, beyond all that any of our Hiſtories make any report to have been in this Land! Heretofore, as far as I have heard or read of, ſo many, and ſuch terrible Fires within the like ſpace of time to have been in this Kingdom, no Memorials of former Times, (for ought I know) give us any account of.

2. As the days are evil, in reſpect of the ſore Afflictions and heavy Judg-

ments which our Sins have already brought upon us, ſo are they evil alſo in reſpect of the Judgments which they further threaten us with. The Apo-
2 Tim. 3. 1. ſtle long ſince foretold, that *in the laſt days perilous times ſhould come.* Such are our times. There was never a time ſince the Reformation, when our juſt fears and dangers were greater than of late they have been. Neither the *Spaniſh* Invaſion of Eighty Eight, nor the Gunpowder Plot, (though horrid Attempts both of them) exceeded the Bloody and Fatal deſigns of the Enemies of Church and State in our days.

O then, how much doth it concern us to redeem the time, *becauſe the days are evil!* To redeem it, for giving *all diligence to make our calling and election ſure*, and for ſetling matters right between God and our own Souls; to redeem time for getting ſtrength to keep our ſelves untainted with the Corruptions of the Times, and ſtrength againſt the Aſſaults of the many dangerous and powerful Temptations which we meet with; to redeem time for ſeeking God, and for offering up to him our moſt fervent and unceſſant Supplications for confounding the wicked Devices, for defeating the Bloody

Bloody Counſels and Barbarous Deſigns, and for breaking in pieces the Diabolical Combinations and Traiterous Conſpiracies of unreaſonable men, that are skilful to deſtroy!

To redeem time, for ſeeking God in behalf of the Reformed Churches abroad, groaning under the ſad Miſeries and Calamities of War and Perſecution; to redeem time, to humble our ſelves for our manifold Sins and Provocations here at home, and for averting thoſe heavy Judgments, which we may fear are hanging over our heads, and haſtening to come upon us, and may ſpeedily overtake us, and ſurprize us, if by our timely Humiliation and ſincere Repentance we prevent it not.

Theſe are ſufficient Reaſons to diſpoſe of our time in ſuch order, as Religion, the Concernments of our own Souls, and the Publick Welfare may have a good proportion of it applied that way. And the worſe the times are we live in, the more careful ſhould we be to redeem it.

The Fourth Sermon.

3 *Ep.* John. V. 3.

Beloved, thou doſt faithfully whatſoever thou doſt to the brethren, and to ſtrangers.

THIS ſhort Epiſtle of St. *John* was written to *Gaius*, a ſincere and zealous Chriſtian. Where he lived, and to what Church he belongod, is uncertain. But whereſoever his abode was, whether at *Corinth*, *Derbe*, or at *Epheſus*, or ſome-where elſe, 'tis evident that he was a man eminent for Religion, and greatly uſeful in his place. The chief intention of St. *John* in writing this Epiſtle to him, ſeems to have been, that he might let him know how much he rejoyced to hear of the grace of

God in him, and that he might encourage him to go on and perſevere in the profeſſion and practice of the truth which he had entertained.

In the words which I have made choice of, we have the principal thing which the Apoſtle here takes notice of in him, commendeth him for, and encourageth him in; and that is, his charity and hoſpitality to the Saints, in relieving them, and giving entertainment to them, or rather his uprightneſs and ſincerity therein; *Thou doſt faithfully whatſoever thou doſt to the brethren, and to ſtrangers.* Which words, that they are to be underſtood of his Charity in relieving, and of his Hoſpitality in entertaining the Saints, is manifeſt from what follows concerning the ſame Subject, in the 8*th*, 9*th* and 10*th* Verſes. *Thou doſt faithfully whatſoever thou doſt to the brethren, and to ſtrangers.* By the Brethren, we may underſtand thoſe who were of the ſame Church with *Gaius*, or at leaſt of the ſame City where his Habitation was; and by Strangers, thoſe other Chriſtians, who either through perſecution were conſtrained to come thither for ſhelter, or whoſe neceſſary buſineſs and ſecular affairs drew

drew them thither; or laſtly, who came to preach the Goſpel, as it ſeems they did, who are intended in the *7th* and *8th* Verſes, concerning whom the Apoſtle ſaith, that for his Name's ſake, that is, for Chriſt's ſake, they went forth, taking nothing of the *Gentiles*; and that therefore Chriſtians who were of ability ought to receive them, that they might thereby be Fellow helpers to the Truth, and promote the propagation of the Goſpel. And though theſe alſo were Brethren in a more general ſenſe; yet being Strangers, thoſe other at home might in a ſtricter ſenſe be ſo called, as being Brethren, not only in reſpect of their common Faith and profeſſion of the ſame Chriſtian Religion, but alſo in reſpect of their more particular relation to one another, as fellow-members of the ſame ſame Church, or Inhabitants of the ſame City.

Now whereas among many other good things, which without all queſtion were to be found in *Gaius*, the Apoſtle ſingles out this particular, *That he did faithfully whatſoever he did in way of charity and kindneſs, both to the brethren, and to ſtrangers*; And whereas he doth not ſo much commend him for the

the thing done, how good ſoever in it ſelf conſidered, as for the manner of doing it; We may hence obſerve,

That 'tis a great duty of a Chriſtian to do every thing faithfully. In treating of which point, I ſhall

1. Shew what it is to do all things faithfully; or wherein this faithfulneſs lies, and what the ingredients of it are.

2. Why 'tis ſo great a Duty, and what Reaſons there are why ſo much ſtreſs ſhould be laid upon it. And

3. I ſhall apply what ſhall have been ſpoken.

I begin with the *firſt* of theſe, which was, to ſhew what it is to do every thing faithfully. In the general, to do any thing faithfully, is nothing elſe but to do it ſincerely, and in ſingleneſs of heart, as looking unto God therein. This *Hezekiah* expreſſeth, *by walking before God in truth, and with a perfect heart.* And the Apoſtle expreſſeth it, *by doing every thing heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men.* Now herein there are theſe things comprehended.

2 Kings 20. 3.

Coloſſ. 3. 23.

1. That

1. That we be careful to look to it, that whatſoever we do, is agreeable to our Maſter's will; that his pleaſure be the Rule by which we are guided in our Actions; that we do nothing but what we know he commands or allows: And that we do not in any thing prefer our own will before his; for that's one point of faithfulneſs in every Servant, to keep cloſe to his Commiſſion, and the pleaſure of his Maſter. This God much inſiſts on. *Whatſoever thing I command you, obſerve to do it; thou ſhalt not add thereto, nor diminiſh from it*, Deut. 12. 32. *Ye ſhall obſerve to do as the Lord your God hath commanded you; ye ſhall not turn aſide to the right hand, or to the left*, Deut. 5. 32. And this exact obſervation of the Rule, and ſtrict adherence thereunto, is required even in thoſe caſes wherein our Reaſon, perhaps, may preſent and dictate ſomewhat elſe to be done, rather than what God commandeth. We muſt hearken to no ſuggeſtions of carnal Reaſon, where the pleaſure of God, for the contrary, is clearly revealed to us. This God often cautions his People againſt; *Ye ſhall not do after all that ye do this day, every man what is good in his eyes*, Deut. 12. 8.

12. 8. So *Numb* 15. 39. God would have his People of *Iſrael look upon the fringe* which he had enjoined ſhould be upon the *borders of their garments, that they might remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and not ſeek after their own heart, and their own eyes*; that is, that they might not do that which they had a mind to do, and which their own depraved reaſon and ſenſe dictated to them, and led them unto, contrary to the Word of God. So then, that's the firſt thing required in faithfulneſs, that we do what we have God's command or allowance for, not preferring our will before his in any thing; nor ſo leaning to our own underſtanding, as to be thereby drawn aſide to the one hand, or the other.

2. In matters of duty, he that would do what he doth faithfully, muſt not only do what is commanded him, but do it in obedience to God, and with reſpect to his Command. A Servant is not to be reputed faithful merely becauſe he doth what is agreeable to his Maſter's will, unleſs he do it in obedience, and becauſe he is commanded; unleſs he eye his Maſter's Command, and do what he doth with reſpect thereunto.

unto. A man may do many things that are commanded, for his own bye ends, and with reſpect to ſomewhat elſe, rather than his Maſter's command; yea, though he do what is commanded, yet perhaps his Maſter's command had no influence upon him at all, and he would never have done it, unleſs there had been ſomewhat elſe to induce him thereunto, beſides his Maſter's pleaſure. Your Servant hath a mind to go to ſuch a place, and thither he would have gone although you ſhould have forbidden him: You command him to go thither, and he goes; but doth he not go in his own Errand more than yours, who would have gone thither, though you had ſent him a contrary way? So God commands us many things which ſuit well with a man's worldly Intereſts and Deſigns, and thereupon a man doth what is commanded, but not ſo much becauſe 'tis commanded, as becauſe it furthers his own ſecular Advantages, and worldly Ends. Doth he herein what he doth faithfully? Doth he ſincerely ſerve his Maſter, or rather doth he not ſerve himſelf? Inſtances in this kind are eaſily to be found. To be diligent in a man's Calling, to be as good as a man's word, and

and as we say, to keep touch punctually with every one with whom a man hath any thing to do; to deal justly and fairly with all men; these are things which God strictly enjoins, and which he lays much weight on; but they are also things which make much for a man's Reputation in the World, which make others willing to imploy him, to deal with him, and trust him, and consequently which much conduce to the advancing of a man's worldly Estate. Now how many are there who do all those external things which God hath commanded, but without any respect at all to his command, and purely with respect to their worldly Interest, that they may preserve their Reputation, have much trading, or be much trusted and imployed some other way, and thereby improve their Estates, and raise their Families. Now though such men may truly be said to deal faithfully with men, yet can they never be said to do what they do faithfully in reference to God, because doing nothing of all this with respect to him, and in obedience to his command, they are not in truth so much his Servants in what they do, as their own. To do such things as these, and

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all other things faithfully, in reference to God; to do them as *Gaius* did, is to do them with an eye on God, and with respect to his command. This was *David*'s care, *to have respect unto all God's commandments.* To look at the Command of God, and to do every thing as designing and aiming at a conformity thereunto: This is to do things *in singleness of heart, as unto Christ*, Eph. 6. 5. *And heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men*, as before, *Coloss.* 3. 23. Psal. 119. 6.

3. To do any thing faithfully, is to do it from due motives, and to right ends; when the motives and ends of our Actions, which set us a work, and put us on, are such as God requires and approves of: Such as are

1. His Glory; This ought to be the principal end in all our Actions. *Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* And to be sure, there is no lawful Action, but is some way or other referrible to God's Glory; for otherwise, how could we be enjoined to do every thing to God's Glory? If there were any good Action uncapable of being referred to that end, it had been in vain to require that of us. 1 Cor. 10. 31.

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2. Another end which we are to propound to our ſelves, and aim at in our Actions, is, That we may thereby pleaſe God, and have acceptance with him. The Apoſtle, exhorting to a charitable relieving of thoſe who are in want, draws an Argument to perſuade thereunto, from the acceptance that it hath with God; thereby giving us to underſtand, that God's being pleaſed with what we do, and his acceptance of us, ought to be one great thing in our eye whatſoever we do; *To do good, and to communicate, forget not, for with ſuch ſacrifices God is well pleaſed.* The ſame Argument he uſeth, exhorting Children to be obedient to their Parents; *Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleaſing to the Lord.* It was therefore *David*'s earneſt prayer unto God, that all his thoughts and words might be pleaſing to God; *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy ſight, O Lord, my ſtrength, and my redeemer.* And this was St. *Paul*'s great care and endeavour; *We labour* (ſaith he) *that whether abſent or preſent, we may be accepted of him.* And his Prayer in behalf of the *Coloſſians* was, *that*

Heb. 13. 16.

Coloſſ. 3. 20.

Pſa. 19. 14.

2 Cor. 5. 9.

that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. Col. 1. 10.

3. Another end that we should propound to our selves in our Actions, is the good of others, according to the nature and tendency of the Action, and so far as 'tis referrible to the good of our Brethren. *Let all things be done with charity,* saith the Apostle. Now Charity hath a respect, not only to our own benefit, but also to the benefit of others. And again, *Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.* Let him not seek his own wealth, his own profit or advantage alone, his own to the detriment, prejudice or hinderance of his Brother, but his Brother's as well as his own, and together with it. 1 Cor. 16. 14. 1 Cor. 10. 24.

And thus we have seen what it is to do whatsoever a man doth faithfully: He doth every thing faithfully, who is carefully solicitous in all things to have his warrant or allowance from the Word of God; who in matters of duty hath an eye at God's Command, and doth not only what is commanded, but because 'tis commanded; and lastly, who doth all things from due motives, and to right ends.

Now in the second place, why is it so great a thing, a Duty of that importance to a Christian, *to do whatsoever he doth faithfully*? There are divers reasons hereof.

1. Without this faithfulness no service is valued or accepted of God, who looks more after this, than any thing else; and where 'tis wanting, there the most specious, the most splendid and glorious Services in his account signify little or nothing, whatever esteem men may have of them. Whence is it that that the very Sacrifices of the wicked, the best things they do, are so far from being pleasing unto God, that they are
Prov. 15. 8. an abomination to him? Is it not because they do nothing faithfully? Is it not because their hearts being rotten and unsound, they do nothing sincerely in obedience to God, nothing from due motives and principles, nothing to right ends? Certainly this is one thing, and not the least, that makes all their performances stink in the nostrils of God. Though the sinfulness of their persons otherwise, and the wickedness of their lives make God abhor their Services, as he often declares; yet this very thing,

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That they do nothing faithfully, as unto God, in that manner, with that frame of heart, and to those ends which he requires, is that which maketh their best Actions yet more abominable to him, as they come from them, and are performed by them. This is that which *Solomon* seems to intend, and the account which he seems to give of this matter. *The sacrifice of the wicked*, saith he, *is abomination to the Lord*; *how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?* As if he had said, Tho the wickedness of his life be enough to make God loath every thing he doth, even his very Sacrifice; yet that he bringeth it with a wicked mind, that pretending to worship God his heart is false and deceitful, that he hath base ends and designs of his own in what he would be thought to do for God, and to God; this is that which makes his Services much more odious and abominable unto him. Prov. 21. 27.

2. There is no Service so mean, contemptible and worthless in man's account, but is both accepted and rewarded of God, if it be done faithfully. *Whosoever shall give to any one but a cup of cold water to drink in Christ's name*, and Mark 9. 42.

Matth. 10. 42.

becauſe he belongs to him, *to a diſciple in the name of a diſciple*, as ſuch, and upon that account, *he ſhall in no-wiſe loſe his reward.* A man may give far greater things than a Cup of cold water, and that to a Diſciple too, and yet ſhall he have no reward from God, if he give it upon ſome other undue conſideration, and for ſome bye ends of his own; but let him do what he doth faithfully and ſincerely, to a Diſciple in the name of a Diſciple, and he ſhall not loſe his reward, though he give him but a Cup of cold water to drink. He may be apt to think that ſo poor a thing as that is ſhall never be ſo far regarded, or taken notice of, as to be rewarded; but Chriſt with much earneſtneſs hath declared ſo much, and aſſured him, that ſo mean a thing as that is, ſo done, ſhall not go unrewarded. Our Saviour, to ratify his Promiſe ſo much the more, and to make it the ſtronger, uſeth ſuch a manner of ſpeech as hath a double emphaſis in it: He doth not barely affirm it, but he doth it with a ſerious and ſolemn Aſſeveration, ἀμὴν, *verily I ſay unto you, he ſhall not loſe his reward*; and again, οὐ μὴ ἀπολέσῃ, *he ſhall in no-wiſe loſe his reward.* The poor Widow's two Mites which made

made but a Farthing, were but a poor matter, a ſlender gift to be caſt into the Treaſury; but yet doing what in that kind ſhe was able, faithfully and ſincerely no doubt, what gracious acceptance had it with Chriſt, and what honourable mention doth he make of it? *Verily I ſay unto you* (ſaid he to his Diſciples) *that this poor widow hath caſt more in, than all they which have caſt into the treaſury.* Mark 12. 42, 43.

'Tis true, *others caſt in out of their abundance, but ſhe of her want did caſt in all that ſhe had, even all her living*, as Chriſt there adds; and this indeed was a great thing; but unleſs ſhe had done it ſincerely and faithfully, her action had never had that high acceptance with Chriſt; if pride and vain-glory, or any other baſe aim had been at bottom, Chriſt the ſearcher of the heart, would have diſcerned it, and inſtead of commending the action, would have abhorred it. In the 6th Chapter of the Epiſtle to the *Epheſians*, v. 5, 6, 7, 8. the Apoſtle exhorting poor Servants to *diſcharge their duty to their maſters according to the fleſh, faithfully*, and faithfully alſo to their Maſter in Heaven, *in ſingleneſs of heart, as unto Chriſt*; and again, *Not with eye ſervice, as men pleaſers, but as*

the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; and yet once more, *with good-will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men*; he encourageth them thereunto from the consideration of the reward of this their service which they may expect from God; *Knowing*, saith he, *that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.* What? tho he be not only a Servant, but a Bond-man, wholly at the command, and under the power of his Master, and by him imployed in the meaneſt ſervices, and put to the baſeſt drudgery, and enforced to beſtow all his time, and lay out all his ſtrength that way; may this poor Bond-man, this contemptible and miſerable Slave, expect any reward of theſe his Services from God? Yes that he may, and he ſhall be ſure not to loſe his reward, if he do what he doth ſincerely and faithfully, if he obey his Maſter, and ſerve him faithfully in obedience to God, and do even his baſeſt drudgery in *ſingleneſs of heart as to Chriſt, and as to the Lord, and not to men*: Be he a free-man, or a bond-man; be his ſervices and imployments honourable or baſe, all is one with God, faithfulneſs is that

which God looks after; whatſoever is done faithfully, and by whomſoever, it ſhall be accepted and rewarded.

3. Where this faithfulneſs is wanting, there the better our Services are for ſubſtance, the more notoriouſly and groſly do we play the Hypocrites. For in ſuch Services we do in ſpecial manner pretend to honour God, and ſeek his Glory, which when 'tis only pretended, and we really mind nothing leſs than what we make ſhew of, how odious and abominable is this in the ſight of God, *who is a Spirit, and will be ſerved in Spirit and in Truth! God is not mocked*; that is, he is not deluded, and put off with outward ſhews and appearances inſtead of realities, as men may be who look upon the outward appearance, but cannot look into the heart. Gal. 6. 7.

So I have done with the two former things propounded, having ſhewed what it is to do every thing faithfully; and why this is ſo great and ſo important a Duty.

I now come to make Application, which was the third thing propounded.

USE.

This presents just matter of Humiliation to us all, even to the best amongst us, in regard there is so little, so very little of this faithfulness to be found in our Actions and Services. We may be apt to think we have done a great deal of good several ways, and so please our selves in the expectation of our reward; but if things be well examined, how little shall we be found to have done, that will be approved of, and further our account hereafter? How much Pride, Vain-glory and Hypocrisy, how much seeking of our selves, and our own things, instead of seeking the Glory of God, and the Things of Christ! How many of the good things which we have done, have been done by us upon other lower Considerations than the command of God; from other Motives, and to other Ends, than that we might thereby honour and please him, and be accepted with him! Instances of our miscarriages this way might be endless almost, if the time would permit, and it were expedient to enlarge so much. I shall touch at some few instances, that by our

our faultings in them we may be the better able to understand our selves, and know how we ought to judge of our selves in reference to the rest of our Life, and the various passages thereof.

My first instance shall be that in which many here present are concerned, and 'tis that of mens Imployment in the way of their Trade and Commerce with others among whom their dealing is. This is the main business of their Life, and takes up the most considerable part of their time; to which I may also add, that 'tis the business on which their parts and strength are mostly laid out. Great pity therefore it were that little of what they do in this way should turn to their account hereafter, as undoubtedly it will not, unless it be done faithfully and sincerely, as unto God, and not to men. And yet here, how common a thing is it with most men in their Trading to look no further than their own outward Advantage, and the procuring a competent, or a fair and comfortable Livelihood and Subsistence for themselves and theirs? Where almost is the Person to be found, who doth everything in the way of that his Calling, as unto

God,

God, and not to men; who sets God before his Eyes as much as may be all the day long; who treats with every man he deals with, or hath to do with throughout the day, as in Gods sight; who seeks and consults the good of others as well as his own, in every Bargain he makes, in every parcel of Ware he sells or buys; in a word, who dischargeth all the Duties of his particular Calling with a respect to God's command, with an eye at pleasing him, and being accepted of him. Lay your hands upon your Breasts, and ask your own hearts, whether this be your daily practice, and what experimental acquaintance you have with these things. If you reflect upon your self impartially, and search narrowly, 'tis to be feared that you will find too much cause to be humbled for your failings.

A second instance I shall give in those who are intrusted with the managing of other mens Businesses and Affairs in any kind, in which their Industry, Skill, Ability, and Faithfulness is required; They are diligent and industrious in the ways of their Employment, they have a care so to manage the Businesses put into their hands, and committed to their

trust,

truſt, as they may be able to give a good account of them, and to approve themſelves faithful to thoſe by whom they are intruſted, as it concerns them to be with reſpect to their Reputation, and their worldly Advantage alſo; for if they ſhould be ſlack, careleſs, and unfaithful, who would make uſe of them, or imploy them? Who would care to intruſt them with any buſineſs of Concernment? But in the mean time, while for their own ends they are thus careful to approve themſelves faithful to men, where is their faithfulneſs to God? Are they as careful and ſolicitous how they may approve themſelves to him in every buſineſs they manage, how they may please him, and be accepted of him? That ſome are ſo, far be it from me to queſtion; but Oh! how few are theſe even? And how rarely to be found among many who ſcarce mind God at all, and who is hardly in all their Thoughts.

A third inſtance may be in the poorer ſort, who are very painful and induſtrious in their way; for ſuch many of the poorer ſort are, though many others of them eat the Bread of idleneſs, and will do it, for their hands refuſe to la-

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bour, and they will not have honest Imployment when they may); but I say those before spoken of, are diligent and industrious, they rise betimes in the morning, they follow their work closely all the day, and go late to bed at night; a very commendable thing in them, and greatly to be encouraged; but yet alas! What's their great end in all this? What do they aim at? Nothing else but that they may eat a piece of Bread, that they may have wherewithal to keep themselves and their Relations alive, if any they have? Do they mind God in their Imployment? Are they diligent in their Calling, because he commands them so to be? And do they in that way of their Employment intend the serving of his Providence? And do they seek his Glory in that their low condition of Life? Do they humbly and contentedly submit to his Providence in thus disposing of things, and in allotting them so slender a portion of the things of this Life, and putting them to get their Livelihood in so painful and laborious a way? And lastly, as low as their condition is, do they seek to honour God in it as much as they can? If they do so, then they do

faithfully

faithfully what they do in their mean condition; and they may assure themselves, that as their eye is on God, so God's Eye is on them, he takes notice of their faithfulness, and will assuredly reward it. But how few are they who look so high as to mind God at all, or in the least study to approve themselves to him?

A fourth instance shall be in Servants. Though there were never more complaints of the carelessness and unfaithfulness of Servants, and perhaps never more cause for such complaints; yet there are those who are diligent and faithful, and cannot justly be charged with idleness or unfaithfulness, or with any of those other usual faults for which Servants are blamed. And yet even amongst these who are the best, and most careful to please those whom they serve, and who do all they can to give them content, how few are there whose eyes are upon their Master in Heaven, and whose greatest care it is so to discharge the Duty of their places, as to please him! Who according to the Apostles injunction before-mentioned do service with *singleness of heart as to the Lord, and not unto men!* Who do all the

the ſervice which they owe to man, as unto Chriſt, ſtudying to pleaſe him therein, and expecting their Wages and Reward from him! For the moſt part, even the better ſort of Servants, look no further than their Maſters here on Earth; as for God, their Maſter in Heaven, 'tis ſcarce in all their thoughts to pleaſe him; and yet without a care and ſtudy to pleaſe him, they are but men-
Eph. 6.6. pleaſers, as the Apoſtle calls them, and muſt never expect either reward or acceptance from God.

5. Another inſtance may be in Parents and Children; to put them together. As for many Parents, they are not without natural Love, Affection and Tenderneſs for their Children in their younger years; they are willing to take any pains with them, they can cheerfully undergo much trouble for them; and when they are grown up, they are full of careful thoughts about them, and ſo ſtudious of their temporal welfare, that they think they can never do enough to promote it. And yet 'tis poſſible that very little of all this may be done in obedience to God, and with reſpect to his Authority and Command, who as he hath furniſhed them with natural

tural Affections to put them on to do for their Children; ſo he hath by his command made it their Duty; without regard of which command, they do theſe things no otherwiſe than the brute Beaſts feed, tender, and protect their young by natural Inſtinct, and from that στοργή, or inbred Affection, which both ſtrongly inclines them to do it, and enables them to do it with delight and pleaſure. That many Parents are led to all that careful and ſolicitous travel and labour of Love which they undergo for Children, by no higher Principles or Inducements, is manifeſt, becauſe if the command of God did prevail with them, it would alſo make them conſcientiouſly Induſtrious in diſcharging their Duty to their Souls, which God hath as ſtrictly enjoined, and which he looks after as much, yea much more, as the Soul is more worth, and the everlaſting miſcarrying thereof of higher conſequence than that of their temporal welfare. But here how miſerably do they neglect them, and betray their Souls to Sin, Satan and Hell! While they neither beſtow any pains upon them to inſtruct them in the Principles of Religion, and their Duty to God; nor uſe a-

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ny effectual means for preventing and reſtraining Sin in them. But neither is this the only evidence of their performing no part of their Duty to them in obedience to God; for if they did, then would the ſame command and authority of God alſo ingage them to reform their own Lives, and frame their Converſations according to the Rule; then would they not, as many of them do, allow themſelves in ſinful ways, ſlighting God's Authority, and caſting his Word behind their back.

And what hath been ſpoken of Parents, the ſame likewiſe may be ſaid of Children. I ſpeak of Children grown up to years of ſome diſcretion, and able to put a difference between good and evil. They obey their Parents, (ſome of them, I mean, though many others are undutiful, headſtrong, and rebellious) I ſay, the better ſort of Children obey their Parents, are unwilling to offend them, or incur their diſpleaſure; but yet 'tis not the command of God that ſways them, or prevails with them. 'Tis becauſe they ſtand in ſome awe of their Parents, but not becauſe they ſtand in awe of God, who hath threatned to puniſh ſtubborn and diſobedient

bedient Children, and hath promiſed to reward ſuch of them as are dutiful, tractable and obedient, as is implied in the Motive annexed to the Fifth Commandment. 'Tis becauſe of their dependance on them, and in regard they live in expectation of further kindneſſes from them; but not with reſpect to God's command, who hath ſaid, *Honour thy father and thy mother*; and, *Children obey your parents, for this is well-pleaſing unto God.* Alas! This conſideration, that 'tis *well-pleaſing unto God*, hath not the leaſt influence upon that obedience which many Children yield unto their Parents, nor are they at all moved or ſtirred up to the performance of their Duty to them thereby.

And ſo I have ſhewed in theſe few inſtances, unto which many more might be added, that though men may do many good things, yet very little of what they do, may upon examination appear to have been done faithfully; ſo far are they from being capable of the Teſtimony and Commendation given to *Gaius*, to whom the Apoſtle ſaith, *Thou doſt faithfully whatſoever thou doſt, both to the brethren, and to ſtrangers.*

All that I ſhall further add by way of Application, ſhall be to ſhew, how this faithfulneſs may be known, and how it may be attained. A man may know himſelf to be faithful;

1. If he be univerſally Conſcientious, if he make Conſcience of one thing, as well as of another. Faithfulneſs will cauſe a man to have reſpect to his whole Duty, to all God's Commandments. If any known Duty be willingly and conſtantly neglected, 'tis a ſhrewd Argument, that little elſe is done faithfully, or at leaſt, ſo faithfully, as it ought to have been done. For thoſe Principles which would engage a man to faithfulneſs in one thing, would alſo do it in
Luk.16.10 all other things. *He that is faithful in that which is leaſt, is faithful alſo in much; and he that is unjuſt in the leaſt, is unjuſt alſo in much.* Upon this ground
Jam 2.10. it is that St. *James* ſaith, *Whoſoever ſhall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all.* The reaſon whereof he adds in the next Verſe; becauſe the ſame Authority of God is deſpiſed and violated in the breach of any one Law, which ſhould prevail with us to yield obedience to all. And he, who cares

cares ſo little for God's Authority, as that notwithſtanding it he is bold to venture on Sin in one thing, would do it in other things, if there were the like opportunity and temptation offered. Wherefore God, who ſees the inward frame of his heart, and how it ſtands affected, looks upon him as guilty of the breach of the whole Law in effect.

2. If you have a ſight of your unfaithfulneſs; and if moreover you heartily bewail it, and ſincerely mourn over it; if you diſcern how apt you are to have by and low ends, to have baſe and unworthy ends in your beſt actions; to have your Eyes on man more than on God; to ſeek your Self, your own Advantage, Credit, Reputation, more than your Maſter's Honour; and furthermore, if theſe things be alſo grievous and burthenſome to you; if you be humbled for them, if you hate them, if you conſtantly pray againſt them, vigorouſly oppoſe them, and ſtrive againſt them; if it be thus with you, 'tis hence manifeſt that you would be faithful, and conſequently that God mercifully looks upon you as faithful, in ſome good meaſure through his Son, and will

for his ſake accordingly treat you, and deal with you. But 'tis much to be feared, that there is little or no faithfulneſs, where there is no diſcerning of a man's unfaithfulneſs; no bewailing it, or ſtriving againſt it. As 'tis a ſign that there is little or no Faith, where there is not a ſight and a ſenſe of the weakneſs of a man's Faith, and of his Unbelief; and conſequently where there is no bewailing it, no ſtriving againſt it; where there are no ſerious endeavours to ſubdue the remainders of a man's unbelief, and to ſtrengthen his Faith.

3. You may warrantably conclude, that you are, in ſome meaſure, faithful unto God in managing the Services and Employments in which his Providence engageth you; if, when you have done your Duty in ſome weak meaſure as you are able, nothing elſe can ſatisfie you, but God's acceptance of your miniſtration. Is acceptation with men, good repute, commendation and applauſe from the World, nothing to you, unleſs God be pleaſed to diſcover his acceptance of you? Are you reſtleſs and unſatisfied, unleſs he be pleaſed ſome way or other to let you know that he is well-pleaſed with what you have done? And doth his

his acceptance quiet your mind, and ſatisfy your ſoul, whatever men judge of you, yea, though all the world ſhould diſlike, and cenſure your actions? This is a great Argument, and a ſolid ground of ſatisfaction to you, that your aim was to pleaſe God, and to approve your ſelf to him; that you did what you did ſincerely and faithfully as unto him, and not unto men. But if mens acceptance of you, if their good thoughts of you, and good words do ſatisfy you, and you look no further; if having this, you are quiet, and at reſt; you have great cauſe to ſuſpect your ſelf, or rather to conclude againſt your ſelf, that you have what you aimed at, and that your main deſign was to pleaſe men rather than God. Had your eye been upon God, and had your chief aim and deſire been to pleaſe him, and to be accepted of him, nothing elſe beſides his acceptance would have ſatisfied you.

Now if you ask how you may attain to do every thing faithfully; I anſwer,

1. You muſt remember God's Preſence and Omniſcience. That Servant will think it concerns him to be faithful, who knows his Maſter's eye is upon

him, and that he narrowly looks after him, and obſerves how he carries himſelf in the Services in which he is imployed. How much more would the conſideration of God's Eye make us faithful? for he ſees not as man ſees, he looks upon the Heart, obſerves not only what is done, but how 'tis done; what the deſire, intent, and deſign of the heart is in every thing that is done. Yea, the inward diſpoſition and frame of the heart in all our actions, is that which, above all things, he looks after and obſerves. Now he that ſhall believe, remember, and ſeriouſly mind this, how can he chuſe but do his beſt endeavour to do every thing faithfully as in his ſight, who *ſearcheth the heart, and tries the reins?*

2. Watch your hearts in all things, which you ſet about, take in hand, or apply your ſelf unto; and obſerve the inward Principles, Motives and Ends of all your Actions. Though you know the things which you do to be lawful, and to be, perhaps, not only lawful, but your Duty; and though there be in you general Intentions and Reſolutions to do every thing faithfully; yet ſuch is the corruption

ruption of your heart, that you will find it often interpoſeth and mingleth it ſelf with your beſt actions, vitiating and depraving them, by putting you upon them from undue Motives, and to baſe and unworthy ends. Wherefore, beſides your general Reſolutions to endeavour in all things to act faithfully, it will be of great concernment to you, that you often put the queſtion to your Soul, and ask, or interrogate your ſelf, ſaying, Why do I, or ſay I, this or that? What is it which at this time moves me thereunto? What's my preſent end or deſign therein? If we frequently thus reflected on our ſelves, and examined the Principles of our words and actions, as we ſhould thereby often diſcover the falſeneſs of our hearts, and our unfaithfulneſs in what we do; ſo it would be a great means to make us faithful, and to keep us that we act not from thoſe undue and ſiniſter motives, and to thoſe by and unworthy ends, which too often prevail in us, and have too great an influence upon our Actions.

3. Remember always and conſider, that 'tis your great intereſt to do every thing faithfully, becauſe otherwiſe all that which you do is loſt, and your la-

bour is laid out to no purpoſe; for you can neither look for acceptance nor reward thereof, nor comfort therein.

1. You can never expect acceptance with God. When you never aimed at pleaſing him, nor looked after acceptance with him, how ſhould you be accepted? Can thoſe your actions pleaſe him, which were never done with any ſuch intent, to the undertaking whereof you were wholly ſwayed by other Conſiderations, and which you would never have ſet your ſelf about, had not other Motives induced you thereunto?

2. Much leſs can you expect any reward at the hands of God, of what is not done faithfully. Why ſhould God reward you for that ſervice, which was not intended to be done for him, but for your ſelf, or for ſome other Maſter? For that ſervice in which his glory was not aimed at, but your own reputation and advantage, or your worldly intereſt one way or other? When the Scribes and Phariſees were vain-glorious and hypocritical in their Duties; Praying, and giving Alms only to be ſeen of men, Chriſt ſaid of them, *They have their reward.* They ſought only praiſe, and com-

Mat 6. 2.

commendation from men; and they have what they ſought after. Men applaud them, and ſpeak well of them, and that's all the reward they muſt look for. As for God, they muſt expect no reward from him, whom they never intended to pleaſe, or honour by their ſervices.

3. Neither can they have any ſound comfort in what is not done faithfully. If the moſt excellent and glorious ſervices, and which are moſt highly eſteemed, valued and magnified by men, ſhould be ſo done, as God would neither accept nor reward them, what true comfort could any man have in them? If God frown upon a man, what good will the ſmiles of all the World do him? *In his favour*, and gracious acceptance, Pſal. 30.5. *is life*; but his frowns and diſpleaſure are as death. *Who may ſtand in* his *ſight* Pſal. 76.7. *when once* he is *angry?* Happy is the man whoſe conſtant ſtudy and endeavour it is in all things ſo to order his Converſation, as to pleaſe him, whoever be thereby diſpleaſed.

The

The Fifth Sermon.

PROV. XXII. 2.

The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all.

THESE words, as we ſee, contain two Propoſitions; the former of which is,

That the rich and the poor meet together:

The latter,

That the Lord is the maker of them all.

Both theſe Propoſitions may be underſtood ſeveral ways; I ſhall ſpeak of them in order; and firſt of the former Propoſition,

The rich and the poor meet together.

Which words are capable of many Interpretations, and 'tis not eaſie to judge which of them *Solomon* chiefly intended. 'Tis poſſible that he might pur-

purpoſely expreſs himſelf in ſuch terms, as that we might not be able to reſtrain the words to any one ſenſe, excluding all other Interpretations. In ſuch Scriptures where divers Expoſitions carry equal probability, ſo that we know not well which to embrace, or which to reject, the ſafeſt way for the moſt part is to take in all thoſe ſenſes which the words will naturally and fairly admit of; ſo among them all we ſhall be ſure to have that which was aimed at. As to our preſent buſineſs, The rich and the poor may be ſaid to meet together,

1. In reſpect of the common nature of Mankind in which they agree, whatſoever other difference there may be between them.

As for their Bodies, there is the ſame rare compoſure and admirable artifice in both, the ſame infinite Wiſdom, Power and Goodneſs of God diſcovered in framing the Bodies of the one, as of the other; there is not a Limb, nor a Joint, nor a Bone, nor a Sinew, nor a Vein, nor an Artery, nor a Muſcle, nor a Nerve, nor a Griſtle, nor the leaſt ſtring or little inſtrument of vital or animal operation or motions, but is alike

to

to be found in the one as in the other, and all alike exquiſitely framed and fitted for the reſpective uſes and ſervices in the Body. In a word; The Body of the poor man is in all reſpects as wonderfully made, as that of the rich.

Then as to their better part, the Spirit, the poor man is endowed with as excellent a Soul as the rich man. Hath the rich man a Soul endowed with the admired faculties of reaſon, and liberty of will? ſo hath the poor man. Have the rich an immortal Soul that ſhall have a Being to eternity? ſo have the poor. Hath the rich man the Image of God ſtampt upon his Soul? ſo hath the poor. Doth the Soul of the one owe its original immediatly and ſolely to God? and ſo doth the Soul of the other. Is God the Father of the Spirits of the rich? ſo is he of the Spirits of the poor. Is the Soul of the rich capable of unſpeakable and endleſs happineſs in the immediate viſion and fruition of God, *in whoſe preſence is the fulneſs of joy, and at whoſe right hand there are pleaſures for evermore?* ſo is the Soul of the pooreſt, every way as capable thereof.

2. The rich and the poor meet together in reſpect of the mutual dependance they

they have upon each other, and the need the one hath of the other. As the poor man cannot live without the rich man, ſo neither can the rich live without the poor. The poor cannot live without the charity and aſſiſtance of the rich, and the rich cannot live without the Service of the poor. How many poor mens Service is neceſſary towards the making of the rich man's Clothing, and the furniſhing of his Table! Doth he wear one Suit of Apparrel, or make one Meal, unto which the labour of the poor man's hands doth not ſome way or other contribute, either immediately or mediately, and more remotely? *The king himſelf is ſerved by the field.* And how many poor mens labour doth the Field require in manuring, and plowing, and harrowing, and ſowing, and fencing, and weeding, and reaping, and inning the Fruits of the Earth! And yet after that all this is done, the Corn that is thus houſed, is not preſently without any more ado made food; there muſt be threſhing, and winnowing, and grinding, and baking, in which the ſervice of many poor mens hands is neceſſary, before the King himſelf can eat a bit of Bread. And as for the Pride and

Eccleſ. 5 9.

and Luxury of many rich men, it were endleſs to reckon up how many poor mens hands in ſeveral ways of imployment are made uſe of to ſupply and furniſh them with materials by which theſe their Vices are fed and maintained.

3. The rich and the poor meet together in reſpect of their joint abode, neighbourhood, and cohabitation here in this World. There is no place where they are not both to be found. In all places where men live together for the mutual help and defence of one another, God's wiſe Providence hath mingled the rich and the poor together. Shew me a rich man's ſtately and well-furniſhed Houſe, and I ſhall not need to go far to ſhew you a poor man's Cottage: and ſo on the contrary. And indeed 'tis needful it ſhould ſo be, for as I have juſt now ſhewed, neither of them could be without the other.

4. The rich and the poor meet together in reſpect of the care and good Providence of God, that is alike extended to both. They are both under the ſame gracious Providence that looks after, provides for, preſerves, ſafeguards and protects them both, though in ways ſome

ſomewhat different. The rich cannot ſay that God only regards them, and fixeth the eye of his Providence on them alone; neither can the poor complain that God diſregards or neglects them.

Pſal. 145. 9. *The Lord is good to all, his mercy is over all his works.* And ſo far is he from having denied the poor the benefit of his gracious Providence, that in conſideration of their deſtitute, diſconſolate, and helpleſs condition, he hath many ways expreſſed his particular and tender care of them above others, as may elſewhere be ſhewed. Many Laws he hath made in behalf of them, many promiſes he hath made to them; he hath laid many charges on the rich to be helpful to them, and made many promiſes alſo to encourage them thereunto.

5. The rich and the poor meet together in the ſame poſſibility and capacity of exchanging Conditions with one another. As the rich is capable of becoming poor, ſo the poor is capable of being made rich. The high Poſſeſſor of Heaven and Earth diſpenceth outward things as he ſees good, and to whom he pleaſeth. He can fill the hand of the poor, and empty the hand of the rich, whenſoever he will: He can reduce the rich

rich to ſuch a condition, as that the ſame hand that was wont to give relief, ſhall receive it; and he can advance the poor to ſuch a condition, as that the ſame hand which received relief, ſhall give it: Such ſtrange turns of God's Providence we often ſee. *God*, according to his good pleaſure, *putteth down one, and ſetteth up another*, Pſal. 75. 7. *He raiſeth the poor out of the duſt, and lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill; that he may ſet him with princes, even the princes of his people*, Pſal 113. 7, 8. And he maketh thoſe that were *brought up in ſcarlet, to imbrace dunghills*, Lam. 4. 5.

And this leads me to the ſecond Propoſition,

The Lord is the maker of them all.

Which, when I ſhall alſo have ſpoken unto, I ſhall then make application of both together.

This latter Propoſition may alſo be diverſly underſtood. The rich and the poor may be conſidered, either as men, or as diſtinguiſhed from one another by the different adjuncts of Riches and Poverty. Now take them under which of theſe two Conſiderations

you pleaſe, *the Lord is the maker of them both.*

1. If you conſider them both as men, ſo God is the maker of them all. And this, whether we look back to the firſt origine of Mankind, or whether we conſider them as taking their beginning from their more immediate Parents.

If we look unto the Rock whence we were all hewen, and to the Pit whence we were digged; if we look back to our firſt Parents, *Adam* and *Eve*, in them we all came out of the hands of God by creation; he framed the firſt man out of the duſt of the Earth, and the firſt Woman out of the Rib of Man, and breathed into them the breath of life, endued them both with an immortal Soul. In this Divine Original, in the honour of this miraculous beginning, the poor man hath an equal intereſt with the rich man; the rich cannot claim nearer kindred to *Adam* and *Eve*, than the poor; the poor can call *Adam* Grandfather, and *Eve* Grandmother, by as good right as the rich.

Again,

Again, if we conſider them with relation to their more immediate Parents, as they derive their beginning from them, ſetting aſide for the preſent the external and accidental conſiderations of Riches and Poverty, Honour and Diſhonour, and the like, which will come to be ſpoken of afterwards; ſo God is the maker of them both; neither hath the Rich and Noble, conſidered merely as a Man, any preeminence in his birth above the poor and ignoble. They both are alike *fearfully made, and curiouſly wrought in the loweſt parts of the earth,* that is, in their Mother's Womb: *In God's book were all the members of them both written; which in continuance were faſhioned, when as yet there was none of them.* And when the Body was by the concurrence of admirable Wiſdom and Power fitted to receive and entertain the Soul, and made a meet Receptacle and Inſtrument for ſo excellent a Being, God infuſed the Soul into the Body, by his immediate Almighty Power, giving it a being out of nothing, and in a wonderful manner, far tranſcend- Pſal. 139. 14, 15, 16.

ing our apprehenſion, united the one to the other. And all this expence of Wiſdom and Power he equally beſtows upon the Rich and the Poor. And then they both endure the ſame confinement and impriſonment in the Womb; the Infant of the rich and Noble hath no more room there, nor is it ſooner at liberty than the Infant of the Beggar. And ſo at the length the ſame Wiſdom, Power, and Goodneſs ſends them both alike into the World; the Infant of the meaneſt, the loweſt, doth not put the Mother to more pains in the birth, than the Infant of the higheſt, it may be to a great deal leſs. And how different ſoever their entertainment is when they are come into the World, yet God ſends them both into it alike; the Infant of the Prince, that ſits upon the Throne, is as naked and ſhiftleſs as the Infant of the pooreſt that imbraceth Dunghills. And thus we have ſeen, that God is the maker of them both, conſidered as men; and that as ſuch, God makes the rich and the poor alike, putting no difference between them, nor being at any

any greater expence of Wiſdom and Power in making of the one, than he is in making of the other.

2. If the rich and the poor be conſidered as they are diſtinguiſhed by thoſe adjuncts of Riches and Poverty, ſo likewiſe God is the maker of them both. 'Tis God's Providence that puts theſe external Differences between men. *The Lord maketh poor,* 1 Sam. 2. 7. *and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up,* as *Hannah* ſings. 'Tis neither by chance, nor by man's skill or induſtry alone, that men become rich, but by the bleſſing of God upon skill and induſtry, and his over-ruling Providence, that gives out, and diſtributes theſe things by no other rule than *the good pleaſure of him, who worketh all things according to the counſel of his own will,* Eph. 1. 11. *The race is not to the ſwift, nor the battel to the ſtrong; neither yet bread to the wiſe, nor riches to men of underſtanding, nor favour to men of skill;* Eccleſ. 9. 11. *It is God that giveth men power to get wealth,* Deut. 8. 18.

This we ſee by experience. Men of great skill and abilities, that underſtand the World, and know how to manage ther Affairs to the beſt advantage; that lay many wiſe Plots, and have many ingenious Deſigns for raiſing themſelves, and advancing their Eſtates; that by their wit and forecaſt put themſelves into many very probable ways of attaining Riches; yet they do but labour in the fire, lay out their wit, and ſpend their ſtrength for nought. All their Projects and Contrivances are but as the Spider's Web, finely and curiouſly ſpun indeed, and drawn out of the very bowels of the Creature; but inſtantly broken to pieces, and ſwept away with one little bruſh of the Beſome. If God do but blow upon mens wiſeſt Counſels for advantaging themſelves, they are preſently blaſted, they wither, fade away, and come to nothing. And ſo we may obſerve on the other ſide, That men of far weaker parts, leſs skill, leſs forecaſt and contrivance, leſs ability for managing their Affairs, yet many times, through the bleſſing of God, who giveth power

to

to get wealth, attain unto great Eſtates. In theſe, as in all other things, God's bleſſing and over-ruling Providence are all in all. The *Pſalmiſt* diſcourſing of the inconſtancy and inſtability of all earthly things, cries out, *Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: To be laid in the ballance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.* And hereupon he counſels men not to rely on any of theſe things, nor to ſuffer their Affections to be faſtened to them; *If riches increaſe, ſet not your heart upon them*: And then preſently he adds in the next Verſe, *God hath ſpoken once, twice have I heard this, That power belongeth to God.* As if he had ſaid, 'Tis a Divine Oracle worthy to be believed, which I have heard from the mouth of God more than once, *That power belongeth to God*; 'tis in the hand of his Providence to diſpoſe of theſe things, to give them, and take them away again at pleaſure; and therefore he, and he only is to be truſted in, and relied on. And as for Riches, ſo again for Poverty, 'tis an effect of Pſal. 62. 9, 10.

God's Providence alſo; though many times as a juſt puniſhment of mens waſtfulneſs, prodigality, unthriftineſs, idleneſs, and many other ſins. But many there are, who though they be induſtrious and unblameable, yet the moſt wiſe Providence of God keeps them low ſtill; and whenſoever they begin to get ſomething about them, and to put up their heads a little, God provides ſomewhat to pull them down again, that meaner Condition being that which his Wiſdom judgeth to be meeteſt for them. We uſe to ſay, Some are born to be poor. There is ſomewhat of truth in it, if we underſtand it aright. As God hath, as it were, deſtined and ordained ſome to be rich, ſo he hath deſtined ſome to poverty. Poor they are, and poor they ſhall be; do they what they can to ſhake of their poverty, they ſhall never be rid of it. Neither yet ought any man to be offended at this diſpenſation of God; much leſs to charge God fooliſhly, as if he had not done herein what is beſt. Fooliſh man may be apt to think how much better it had been if God had

had made all men rich, and Poverty had been a thing which the World never knew. But let no man oppoſe his own fooliſhneſs to God's Wiſdom. *Who hath been his counſellor?* Rom. 11. 34. *Shall any teach God knowledge?* Job 21. 22. It becomes us, weak, blind, and ſhallow Creatures that we are, ever-more to think well of what God doth, whether we can diſcern the grounds and reaſons of his Providence or no; and to have a holy veneration even for thoſe his Works, the cauſes whereof we do not underſtand, nor are able to give an account of. But as to the matter in hand, though perhaps it may not be needful nor expedient that we ſhould know all the reaſons which God had for putting ſuch a difference between men, making ſome of them to be rich, and others poor; yet ſome imperfect account of ſome of the reaſons of this Diſpenſation we can give. That God doth no man any wrong in with-holding the things of this World from him, while he is pleaſed to load others with his benefits, giving them as much as heart can wiſh, will

will be readily granted by all who acknowledge God's Sovereignty, and allow him to have a rightful power to do as he pleaſeth with his own. Beſides, who can challenge any thing, a crumb of Bread, or a drop of Water at the hands of God? He that hath leaſt, muſt he not confeſs that he hath more than he hath deſerved? *Who hath firſt given unto him?* ſaith the Apoſtle, *Rom.* 11. 35. *In him we live, and move, and have our being:* And ſeeing he hath given us our being, and all our Powers and Abilities, we can render nothing to him in way of ſervice, or otherwiſe, but what we have received from him. Can we deſerve any thing at his hands by rendring him that which was his own before, that which we owed him? Again, beſides all this, we have all, by our manifold ſins, and continual provocations, deſerved to be deprived of whatever mercy we enjoy. We ſhould long ago have been turned into Hell, if we had had our due, and been dealt with according to our ſins; And how much more then have we deſerved to be ſtripped of all our Comforts?

forts? Be it never ſo little and ſo mean that you have, you had not now had it, if God had been extream to mark what you had done amiſs. It had been all gone, it had been ſnatcht away from you in diſpleaſure, if God's patience and long-ſufferance had not ſtood you in more ſtead than any deſerts of your own.

Well then, this I take for granted, that he who is in the pooreſt, the moſt deſtitute, the moſt forlorn, the moſt deſolate and deſpicable condition among you all, is convinced that God hath done him no wrong, nor can do any man wrong, by denying him that which he is not bound to give him.

Now moreover, that God in putting ſuch a difference between men, is not only juſt, but moſt wiſe and good, may appear to any man that ſhall duly conſider this diſpenſation.

1. 'Tis for the Order and Beauty of the Univerſe, that there ſhould be variety in the World, and interchangeable Viciſſitudes of things; Winter and Summer, Spring and Autumn, Sickneſs and Health, Proſperity and Adverſity,

verſity, Light and Darkneſs, do all contribute, though in ſeveral ways, to adorn and beautify the Creation, and ſet forth the Power, Wiſdom, and Goodneſs of the Creator. And even thoſe things which in ſome mens eyes may ſeem to be the ſpots and blemiſhes of the Creation, (for ſo men of profane ſpirits may be too prone to judge of them) do as well contribute to the beauty and luſtre of the whole, as thoſe things that are of eminent beauty and perfection. Even Monſters ſerve to ſet forth and commend the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God, in the exact frame, due lineaments, right proportions and features, ſtrength and beauty of perfect Creatures. So the poor, ſtrait, and indigent condition of ſome, ſo much the more commends the Bounty and Goodneſs of God to others; and provokes them, at leaſt ſhould provoke them to ſo much the greater love and thankfulneſs to that God who hath been ſo bountiful to them, and hath been pleaſed to put ſuch a difference between them and others, and this albeit they have deſerved at the hands of God no more than thoſe their inferiours

ſeriours who are in the moſt neceſſitous condition.

2. This difference which God hath put between men, affords the Rich opportunities of exerciſing their Charity, Pity, and Compaſſion towards the Poor; and gives the Poor occaſion of exerciſing their Faith and Truſt in God for ſupplies of Neceſſaries; Patience, Humility, Contentment with their mean condition, quiet ſubmiſſion to the good pleaſure of God in thus dealing with them, and thankfulneſs to God for thoſe helps and aſſiſtances which he is pleaſed to reach forth to them by the hands of thoſe with whom he depoſited more of the things of this World, on purpoſe that they might be helpful to thoſe who have leſs.

3. God hath been pleaſed to put this difference between men in regard of the neceſſity there is of different Stations and Conditions, different Services and Imployments for procuring and carrying on the good and welfare of the Community of Mankind. Some muſt govern, and others muſt be governed; or elſe we ſhall quickly be ruined, and all things will run into confuſion.

confuſion. Some muſt labour in the Field, others muſt grinde at the Mill, others handle the Diſtaff; ſome muſt be imployed in meaner, other in higher Services, in order whereunto it was fit that men's conditions ſhould be ſuited to thoſe Imployments in which they are to be ſerviceable to God and their Generation.

Now the Application of what hath been ſpoken, follows; and this will concern all. I ſhall firſt ſpeak to the Rich, and then to the Poor. As for the Rich, or thoſe whom God hath been pleaſed to intruſt with a larger portion of Temporal things, they may hence be minded of their Duty ſeveral ways. If the Rich and the Poor meet together in all thoſe reſpects before-mentioned, and God be the Maker of them all, both as men, and as conſidered under the different Adjuncts of Riches and Poverty; then may the Rich hence be cautioned and admoniſhed.

1. Not to deſpiſe the Poor. This is that which men who even wallow in

in plenty, and abound with the good things of this Life, are very ſubject to. A poor man is many times a contemptible thing in their eyes; and as he hath occaſion to come near them, he ſcarce meets with thoſe civilities from them that are due to Mankind. And uſually none are more faulty this way, than ſuch as have the greateſt obligation to civility and condeſcenſion; I mean ſuch as were not long ſince in a mean condition themſelves, and have but newly been advanced to an higher Station. But theſe, and whoſoever elſe may be blame-worthy in this reſpect, ſhould conſider what hath above been diſcourſed of.

(1.) That the pooreſt and moſt forlorn Creature who is moſt deſpicable in their eyes, hath as noble and excellent a Soul as they have themſelves, or as the greateſt Potentate in the World hath; and as for his very Body, though cloathed with naſty Rags, the exquiſite Workmanſhip thereof is no leſs admirable than that of his that is cloathed with Scarlet, and adorned with Gold and Pearls, and whatever Nature

Nature or Art could contribute to make it beautiful and lovely.

(2.) That the pooreſt man in the World is as dear to God as they are, and as much under the Care and gracious Providence of God; for fine Cloaths, and Riches, and Honours, commend no man to God; high and low, rich and poor are alike to him;
Act 10.34 for he *is no reſpecter of perſons*; neither doth he rate or value any man according to theſe things. 'Tis grace and holineſs that he looks after, and accordingly proportions his eſteem for men. *The Lord ſeeth not as man ſeeth; man looketh upon the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart*, 1 Sam. 16. 7 *The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous*, Pſal. 34. 15. *The Lord taketh pleaſure in them that fear him, in thoſe that hope in his mercy*, Pſal. 147. 11. But as for wicked and ungodly men, of what rank or quality ſoever they may be in this World, the Lord hates and ab-
Pſal. 5. 5. hors them.

(3.) They ſhould conſider, that the pooreſt man in all the World is as capable of being admitted to the bliſ-

full

ful Vision and Fruition of God in the World to come, is as capable of glory and eternal happiness, as the richest. As God hath given the same Rational and Immortal Soul to Rich and Poor, whereby they are both capable of the sight and enjoyment of God; so hath Christ died for both, and paid the same invaluable price for the Redemption of both; and so he hath commanded his Gospel to be published alike to both, and therein the same terms of Salvation to be indifferently propounded to the one and the other. There is not one Gospel for the Rich, and another for the Poor; nor are the terms of peace with God, and reconciliation to him, more easy and favourable for the one than for the other. The Gospel puts no difference between men with reference to those different circumstances as to outward things, under which they may be. It speaks the same Language to all; *Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned,* Mark 16. 15, 16. *Without holi-*

neſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord, Heb. 12. 14. *Except ye repent ye ſhall all periſh*, Luke 13. 3. *Except ye be converted ye ſhall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*, Mat. 18. 3.

Now if God values the Souls of Rich and Poor alike, hath taken the ſame care of, and made the ſame proviſion for the Salvation of both; if Rich and Poor meet together, ſtand both upon even ground, and are upon equal terms, as to the matters that are of higheſt importance and everlaſting concernment to the one and the other; ſhould any man deſpiſe his poor Brother upon the account of theſe temporal things, theſe poor and worthleſs trifles that ſignify as good as nothing?

2. The Rich may hence be cautioned, Not to count the Poor a grievance or heavy burthen to them; I mean the honeſt, ſober, humble, modeſt and induſtrious Poor. As for wicked, looſe, idle, and unprofitable Perſons, whether they be Poor or Rich, they are not only a grievance, but the very Peſts of the places where they live, as expoſing them to God's wrath,

wrath, and drawing down his Judgments upon themſelves and others.

1. While you count the Poor a grievance, and think how much happier the World would be if all men were Rich as you are, you forget that the Rich ſtand in need of the Poor, and could not ſubſiſt without them. Though you had ſuch a Maſs of Treaſure as you could wallow in Gold and Silver, yet theſe Metals could not clothe you; neither could you feed and live upon them; Gold and Silver would neither quench your thirſt, nor ſatisfie your hunger. You are beholding to the labour of the Poor man's hands for your Raiment and your Diet, as I have ſhewed before.

2. 'Tis a great advantage that you have the Poor among you, and continually before your eyes, to make you the more thankful for that plenty that God hath bleſſed you withal (as hath alſo been ſaid), *Who maketh thee to differ from another?* as the Apoſtle puts the queſtion in another caſe. Why had not he that laſt cra- 1 Cor. 4. 7.

ved a Bit of Bread at your Door, been the Rich man, and you the Beggar? Why had not he been in your room, and you in his? Why had not he been Arrayed in your Silk and Purple, and you clad in his Rags? Can you look upon him, and reflect on your ſelf without a deep ſenſe of his moſt free and undeſerved Bounty to you, who is the Maker of Rich and Poor, and of his own good pleaſure alone hath put this difference between you and your Poor Neighbour? The advantage of this kindly Incentive and Spur to thankfulneſs, you owe to the Poverty of your Brother. Beſides, as the beholding of his Poverty makes you more thankful for your abundance, ſo it helps you to reliſh your good things the better, and puts a ſweetneſs into them which you would not have taſted, unleſs your Neighbours wants had been as ſauce to your full Diſhes to make them ſavoury to you. So you are beholding to him not only for your Meat, but for your Sauce alſo.

3. The

3. The Poor that live among you, afford you a rich opportunity of laying out and imploying that which God hath put into your hand to the beſt advantage. Were it not for the Poor, you would want an object on which to exerciſe your Charity and Compaſſions, and ſo you would loſe much of your comfort here, and a great part of your reward hereafter. What comforts, what inward ſatisfactions and contents there are in doing good to the diſtreſſed, he only knows who hath with humility and ſincerity much exerciſed himſelf that way. He who hath been much in that Duty, can upon his own experience ſubſcribe to that of our Saviour, that 'tis a *more bleſſed* thing *to give than to receive.* Act. 20. 35 But beſides the preſent comforts that are to be enjoyed in the right performance of this Duty, there is moreover the reward hereafter, which God hath graciouſly promiſed, and will not fail to beſtow. As a man ſoweth here, ſo ſhall he reap hereafter; *He that ſoweth bountifully, ſhall reap bountifully.* 2 Cor. 9. 6. He ſhall be fully recompenced for whatſoever

ſoever he hath done of this nature at
Luke 14. 14. the *Reſurrection of the juſt.* And this ſo exactly and punctually, that not ſo much as a Cup of cold Water given to a Diſciple in the name of a Diſciple, ſhall be unrewarded.

What other improvement of your Riches comparable with this, can you poſſibly make? Imploy them how you will any other way for your Temporal Advantage, they will no longer ſtand you in ſtead than while your abode ſhall be here; when Death comes, all is gone; you muſt then leave whatſoever you have laid together and heaped up; and you muſt go as naked out of this World as you came into it, excepting only your Winding-ſheet and Coffin; that's all you can carry hence, and that alſo to moulder into duſt together with your ſelf. But now the Poor give you an opportunity of making that uſe of Riches that ſhall abound to your account another day, and ſo in effect you carry them along with you into the other World.

3. See-

3. Seeing the Rich and Poor meet together in ſo many reſpects; and ſeeing God is the Maker of them both; and ſeeing 'tis by his moſt wiſe and gracious Providence that there ſhould be ſuch different Ranks and Conditions of men, that ſome ſhould be full, and others empty, ſome ſhould abound, and others be in want; let the Rich be hence cautioned not to oppreſs the Poor.

(1.) This were a foul and wretched abuſe of thoſe Advantages in Power and Wealth, which God hath graciouſly afforded them above their Brethren.

(2.) This were horrid unthankfulneſs to God, who hath been pleaſed out of his free Goodneſs and Bounty to put ſuch a difference between them and others.

(3.) This were directly contrary to the deſign of God, in beſtowing upon one a larger Portion of theſe Temporals than another, which was, that he that hath much, might be help-

ful and beneficial to him that hath little, and not that he might thereby be the better enabled to keep under and crush his needy and distressed Brother. God hath made no man strong, that he might push at those that are weaker; nor hath he made any man Rich, that he might by his Wealth and Riches imperiously domineer over and trample on his Poor Neighbour. Neither may the Rich man be emboldened to oppress his poor Brother, because he is weak and unable to make resistance. The weaker he is, and the more unable to defend or right himself, the more unsafe it is to meddle with him: For God himself hath undertaken to stand by, and help those who have no power to help themselves. Take heed what you do in taking Advantage of the Poor man's weakness to injure and oppress him. Are you not aware, that while you abuse your Wealth and Power to the oppressing of your weak Brother, and think you may do as you list with him that hath no might to oppose you, or defend himself against you;

you

you have to do with God, and enter the Liſts with him, who hath ſaid, *For the oppreſſion of the poor, and for the ſighing of the needy will I ariſe to ſet him in ſafety from him that puffeth at him*, Pſal. 12. 5. *Who delivereth the poor from him that is too ſtrong for him, yea the poor and needy from him that ſpoileth him*, Pſal. 35. 10? If you love your ſelf, and would conſult your own peace and ſafety, meddle not with God, which certainly you do in oppreſſing your poor and impotent Brother. Take *Solomon*'s Counſel, who ſaith, *Rob not the poor becauſe he is poor, neither oppreſs the afflicted in the gate; for the Lord will plead their cauſe, and ſpoil the ſoul of thoſe that ſpoiled them*, Prov. 22. 22, 23.

Now the Poor may be oppreſſed many ways; I ſhall only at preſent give two inſtances thereof.

1. The Rich may oppreſs the Poor by denying them thoſe helps which of right belong to them, or by diverting to other uſes than that which was originally

originally by the Bounty of Benefactors intended and designed for their relief. This were an horrible and crying Sin; this were no better than removing the old Land-mark, and entring into the Field of the Fatherleſs, which *Solomon* would have no man ſo hardy as to attempt, becauſe

Prov. 23. 10, 11. *their redeemer is mighty, and he will plead their cauſe.* You who have the diſpoſing of the Poors-money, take heed you derive not upon you the guilt of this ſin; a ſin of that heinous nature, as that it were enough to ſet a whole Town on Fire, and turn it into Aſhes; look to it therefore, and ſee that the Charity of Benefactors run in its own proper Channel.

2. The Poor may be oppreſſed by the Rich, in dealing rigorouſly and unmercifully with them, and uſing them hardly in thoſe things in which they make uſe of their labour. To enforce them to do their work upon ſuch pitiful terms, as that all which they can get by their utmoſt diligence will hardly buy them Bread to keep them alive, while you raiſe your ſelves,

ſelves, and grow Rich upon their unceſſant Labours, is certainly in God's account no better than Oppreſſion, a ſin which may juſtly bring the Curſe of God upon your Eſtates. If there ſhould be any here that are concerned, I would earneſtly requeſt them to conſider ſeriouſly of it. If upon enquiry you ſhould find you have been guilty of this kind of Oppreſſion, you may well look upon it as one of thoſe things for which God hath had a Controverſy with you, and puniſhed you, by ſnatching away from you what had been ſo heaped together. And let me further lay theſe things before you to be pondered.

1. To take advantage of poor Peoples Neceſſities, and make them part with their Work at any rate, becauſe they muſt have Bread for themſelves and theirs, or ſtarve, is that meaſure which you would not ſhould be made you, if you were in their Circumſtances. Suppoſe your ſelf to be in their condition, and they in yours; would you not then think it very hard meaſure to be ſo dealt with?

2. Though

2. Though allowing them for their Labour ſo much as might make their Livelihood a little better, you would gain ſo much the leſs, yet you would have much more comfort in what is ſo gotten, were it never ſo little. 'Tis but an uncomfortable thing for any man to grow Rich by pinching the Poor.

3. You would be ſure to have the Bleſſing of God, and not his Curſe, upon what is ſo gotten, be it more or leſs. I beſeech you let this be written upon the Table of your Heart, let it be deeply ingraven there as a certain Truth, an unqueſtionable Principle which can never fail you, That in the Concluſion you ſhall be never the poorer for uſing Poor people well; and you ſhall be never the Richer for having uſed them hardly.

Having hitherto ſpoken to the Rich, I come now to ſpeak a few words to the Poor, who may alſo from what hath been ſaid, be minded of their Duty ſeveral ways.

1. Do

Do the Rich and Poor meet together, and do they both ſtand upon even ground, and are they upon equal terms, as in many other reſpects before mentioned? So more eſpecially as to their higheſt Concernments are the Poor, the Loweſt, the Meaneſt, and the moſt Contemptible amongſt them, as much the Objects of God's Care, and of his gracious Providence, as the Rich; even as thoſe among the Rich, the height and ſplendor of whoſe condition in the World have made them Objects of the Envy of all their Inferiours. Are the pooreſt, even ſuch as are clothed in Rags, in as fair a way for Heaven, and as capable of Grace here, and Glory hereafter, as the greateſt Princes, as the moſt Illuſtrious and Renowned Potentates in the World; Then let the Poor hence learn, not to be diſcouraged, much leſs give way to murmuring and repining at the Providence of God, that has put ſuch a difference between them and their Superiors, as to the things of this World. It has ſeemed good to the Wiſdom of God to place them below, while others are ſeated above; to make their condition mean and deſpicable,

while

while the conditions of others hath rendered them honourable, and even adorable in the eyes of the inferior World. But ſeeing the Poor and the Rich meet together, and are in equal condition as to the beſt, the moſt excellent, and the moſt deſirable things; What good reaſon is there why they ſhould not be well contented with their condition, and be moſt thankful unto God for it? What reaſon have they to juſtify their envying at the Rich and Honourable, ſeeing they themſelves are no way inferior to them, and come no way ſhort of them as to thoſe things which are of greateſt value, and of higheſt importance?

USE 2.

Seeing the Poor are as capable of Heaven and Eternal Happineſs in the World to come, as the Rich; Let them give all diligence to be duely qualified for it; let their conſtant and earneſt endeavours be to labour after a meetneſs to be made *partakers of the inheritance of the ſaints in light*. Seeing God has put them in as fair a way for Heaven as any elſe, let them take heed that they fall

fall not ſhort of Heaven through their ſloth and careleſneſs, and through their neglect of the great Salvation which God in the Goſpel reveals, and as freely offers to them as he doth to the Rich, and which, if they be not wanting to themſelves, they may be made partakers of upon the ſame terms on which the Rich are capable thereof; yea in ſome reſpects upon eaſier terms; foraſmuch as the Riches, Honours, Preferments, and high Places of their Superiors ſo load, incumber and clog them, as they are thereby much retarded and hindered in their way to Heaven. Both conditions have their difficulties, both their advantages; both have the like end to reſpect, both have the like capacity of attaining it; herein they both meet together, but the happineſs of all are, *That God is the maker and diſpoſer of both.*

The

The Sixth Sermon.

2 CHRON. 33. 10, 11, 12, 13.

And the Lord ſpake to Manaſſeh, *and to his People: but they would not hearken.*
Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the Captains of the Hoſt of the King of Aſſyria, *which took* Manaſſeh *among the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to* Babylon.
And when he was in Affliction, he beſought the Lord his God, and humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers,
And prayed unto him, and he was intreated of him, and heard his Supplication, and brought him again to Jeruſalem *into his Kingdom. Then* Manaſſeh *knew that the Lord he was God.*

IN this Chapter we have a brief Hiſtory of the Reign of *Manaſſeh*, from the Beginning of the Chapter to the 20*th* Verſe. This *Manaſſeh* was the Son of *Hezekiah*, a moſt wicked

Son, though deſcending from a moſt pious and religious Father. I ſay, a moſt wicked Son, for ſuch he was till God was pleaſed to humble him, and work a Change in him. He that ſhall read the Account that is here, and in 2 *Kings* 21. given of the former Part of his Reign, and compare it with the worſt of all the Kings that went before him, ſhall find that in all manner of abominable Wickedneſs he exceeded them all: His Sins were of a moſt horrid Nature; Idolatry, Witchcraft, conſulting with Wizards, and ſuch as had familiar Spirits; his cauſing his own Son to be burnt in way of Sacrifice to his Idols; his barbarous Cruelty in ſhedding innocent Blood in that abundance, that he filled *Jeruſalem* with it from one End to the other. Moreover, as theſe his Sins were hainous and abominable in their own Nature, ſo were the Aggravations of them ſuch, as greater or higher could not eaſily be. Theſe Aggravations hath the Spirit of God in the Hiſtory mentioned, and in a ſpecial manner inſiſted on.

1. That he wrought all this Wickedneſs, notwithſtanding the good Example that his Father *Hezekiah* had given

given him, by his Zeal againſt Idolatry; *That he built up again the high Places which his Father had deſtroyed.* 2 Kings 21. 3. 2 Chron. 33. 3.

2. *That he built Altars in the Houſe of the Lord, of which the Lord had ſaid, In* Jeruſalem *will I put my Name. That he ſet a graven Image of the Grove that he had made in the Houſe which God hath choſen to place his Name therein for ever.* 2 Kings 21. 4. Ver. 7. It had been an horrible Sin, if he had only built his Altars, and ſet his Images any where elſe; how much more to ſet them up in the Houſe of God, the Place which God made ſuch account of, and ſo highly eſteemed; that he ſhould ſet up his Idols in that Place, as it were in Defiance of God, and of his Worſhip there?

3. That he ſhould not content himſelf to have offered other Sacrifices to his Idols, unleſs he had alſo offered his own Son in Sacrifice, and cauſed him to paſs through the Fire.

3. That he did worſe than thoſe Nations which God deſtroyed, and caſt out before them for their Sins; that the fearful Examples of God's Severity againſt them ſhould not deter him from committing the ſame and greater Abominations.

If you demand how this could be; how it was poſſible that *Manaſſeh* ſhould do worſe than thoſe Heathen Nations that were caſt out and deſtroyed for their Sins?

I anſwer; (1.) *Manaſſeh* and his People had thoſe Means of Grace which thoſe Heathen Nations never injoyed. *Manaſſeh* and his People ſinned againſt that Light which was never vouchſafed the *Amorites*; and this did not a little heighten their Sins.

(2.) *Manaſſeh* erected more Images and Idols than the *Amorites* had. The ſeveral Nations in *Canaan* generally kept themſelves to thoſe particular Gods which they called their own; but *Manaſſeh* multiplied his Idols.

(3.) Thoſe Nations were not wont to change their ſuppoſed Gods, but ſtrictly adhered to them: Thus did not *Manaſſeh* and his People; and in this Reſpect their Idolatry was worſe than that of the Heathen, as God by the Prophet *Jeremiah* ſets it forth, and aggravates it;

Jer. 2. 11. *Hath a Nation changed their Gods, which are yet no Gods? But my People have changed their Glory for that which doth not profit.* The Gods of thoſe Heatheniſh Nations were no Gods, and yet thoſe

thoſe Nations would not caſt them off, and take up other Gods; they ſtuck and adhered to them ſtedfaſtly and reſolutely, and would not exchange them for the true God: but *Manaſſeh* and his People forſook the only true and living God that made the Heavens, and betook themſelves to the Worſhip and Service of falſe Gods; they changed their Glory (for ſuch was the true God to them, while they owned him alone, and cleaved to him) they changed their Glory for them that were no Gods, but the Work of Mens Hands. In theſe Reſpects *Manaſſeh* did worſe than the Heathen.

4. Another Aggravation of his Sin was, that whereas the ſhedding the Blood of one innocent Perſon had been a crying Sin, he ſhed it at ſuch a rate, that he filled *Jeruſalem* with innocent Blood from one End to the other; there was no Part of that great City where the Blood of innocent Perſons that had been cauſleſly ſpilt, was not to be ſeen, and where the Cry of it might not be heard: So great and ſo hainous were this Man's Sins, and ſo high were the Aggravations of them.

Now in the Words which I have read,

we are informed how God was pleaſed to deal with him; what Courſes he took to reclaim him and his People; and what was the Effect thereof upon him and them. This in the General.

More particularly in the Words following.

In the Words we have;

1ſt. God's great Mercy to him and his People, in calling them to Repentance, and in giving them warning of approaching Judgments in caſe they ſhould ſtill perſevere in their Sins and Impenitency. The Lord ſpake unto *Manaſſeh* and to his People, as 'tis here briefly expreſs'd, but more fully in 2 *Kings* 21. 10, 11, 12, 13. *The Lord ſpake by his Servants the Prophets, ſaying, Becauſe* Manaſſeh *King of* Judah *hath done theſe Abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the* Amorites *did, which were before him, and had made* Judah *alſo to ſin with his Idols: Therefore thus ſaith the Lord God of* Iſrael, *Behold, I am bringing ſuch Evil upon* Jeruſalem *and* Judah, *that whoſoever heareth of it, both his Ears ſhall tingle. And I will ſtretch over* Jeruſalem *the Line of* Samaria, *and the Plummet of the Houſe of* Ahab; *and I will wipe* Jeruſalem, *as a Man*

Man wipeth a Diſh, wiping it, and turning it upſide down.

2*dly.* We have the Obſtinacy and Impenitency of *Manaſſeh* and his People; they would not hearken.

3*dly.* We have an Account of that further Courſe which God took with *Manaſſeh*, in order to his reclaiming, when gracious Calls and Invitations to Repentance, and Warnings of approaching Judgments, would not prevail: *The Lord brought upon them the Captains of the Hoſt of the King of* Aſſyria, *which took* Manaſſeh *among the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to* Babylon.

4*thly.* We have an Account of the Effect which this ſevere Courſe had upon *Manaſſeh*: When he was in Affliction, he beſought the Lord his God, and humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.

5*thly.* We have the Iſſue of his humbling himſelf, ſeeking God, and praying to him: God was intreated of him, and heard his Supplication, and brought him again to *Jeruſalem* into his Kingdom.

6thly. We are informed what *Manaſſeh* gained, or what he learned by all this; *Then* Manaſſeh *knew that the Lord he was God.*

To ſpeak of theſe Particulars in order.

1. We have in the Words God's great Mercy to *Manaſſeh* and his People, in calling them to Repentance, and giving them Warning of approaching Judgments, in caſe they ſhould ſtill perſiſt obſtinately and impenitently in their ſinful Courſes. This gracious and merciful Dealing of God with *Manaſſeh* and his People may afford us theſe two Obſervations.

I. *That God is graciouſly pleaſed to call and invite Sinners to Repentance, and to give them Warnings of the Judgments that are hanging over their Heads, before he brings his Judgments upon them.* This is the uſual Courſe of God's Providence; he is not wont to ſurprize Men with his Judgments before he gives them any notice of the Danger they are in; but he firſt warns them, calls them to Repentance, and threatens them if they ſhall ſtill continue in their Impenitency; and when all his Warnings

ings are ſlighted, then he ſtrikes. Thus he warned the old World, and called them to Repentance by the Preaching of *Noah*, all the while the Ark was a building. Thus by the Prophets he called the Jews to Repentance, and threatned them with the Captivity, if they repented not. Thus Chriſt himſelf called them to Repentance; and in caſe of their Impenitency ſtill perſiſted in, threatned the utter Deſolation and Deſtruction of the Temple and City of *Jeruſalem* by the Romans.

Now the Reaſons why God is pleaſed thus to deal with Sinners; why he thus calls them to Repentance, and gives them warning before he ſtrikes, are principally theſe two.

1*ſt.* That by their timely Repentance and Reformation they may prevent his Judgments; and that he may have no Occaſion of uſing that Severity againſt them, which if they repent not, will be neceſſary both for the Vindication of his Honour, and in order to their Humiliation and Reformation: *God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men.* He takes no Delight in ſevere Courſes, unleſs where there is a Neceſſity of them, in regard Lam. 3. 33.

gard that gentler Means do no Good.

2dly. He gives Warning, calls to Repentance, and promiſes Mercy upon Repentance, before he ſtrikes; to the End, that if Men will take no Warning, if ſin they will, and perſevere ſtill in their Sins, whatever it coſts them, the Juſtice of his Proceedings againſt them may be cleared, that the Sinners themſelves may be rendred inexcuſable, and every Mouth may be ſtopped, or be enforced to acknowledg that he is righteous, even when he puniſheth them moſt ſeverely.

Uſe 1. If God be ſo gracious as to call to Repentance, and give Warnings before he ſtrikes, let us not be unconcerned at ſuch Warnings, let us not ſlight them or contemn them; neither let our Hearts fret or riſe againſt them, but humbly, patiently, and thankfully entertain them, and carefully improve them. If God's Deſign in them be to prevent Puniſhments, let not us by our ſlighting and diſregarding them, draw thoſe Evils upon our ſelves which they are deſigned to keep off. 'Tis a dangerous thing not to take Warning when 'tis given us, when God gives it that he may

may bring us to Repentance by it. The Admonition that *Ely* gave his Sons, and the Repreſentation that he made to them of the Danger of their ſinful Practices, was in effect a Warning from God: but they regarded it not; and what was the Iſſue but their Ruine? The Spirit of God ſaith, *That they hearkned not to the Voice of their Father, becauſe the Lord would ſlay them. God ſhall wound the Head of his Enemies, and the hairy Scalp of every one that goeth on ſtill in his Treſpaſſes.* And the making good of this Threatning may They above others expect, that ſtill go on in their Treſpaſſes againſt Warnings; and eſpecially if they ſtill go on againſt many Warnings. *He that being often reproved hardneth his Neck, ſhall ſuddenly be deſtroyed, and that without Remedy.* Do we believe this? If we do, how ſhould we haſten to make our Peace with God; eſpecially ſuch of us as have long gone on in our Sins againſt all Warnings and Calls to Repentance? We may think perhaps that becauſe we have been long warned and threatned, and yet ſtill God holds his Hand, and forbears to ſtrike, we are in no Danger; it may be the long Patience which God hath

1 Sam. 2. 25.

Pſal. 68. 21.

Prov. 29. 1.

hath exerciſed towards us, makes us regardleſs of his Warnings: and now at length we begin to make account that we may ſafely enough go on in our old Ways, there is no ſuch Danger as hath been pretended. But let us take heed how we thus abuſe the Patience and Long-ſufferance of God. Whatever our preſent Thoughts are, or how much ſoever we may now flatter our ſelves, theſe two things we ſhall certainly find in the end.

1. That how long ſoever God may bear with us, yet he will fulfil his Threatnings in the end, unleſs by our Repentance we prevent them. Heaven
Mat. 24. 35 and Earth ſhall rather paſs away, than any one Word that he hath ſpoken, ſhall fall to the Ground.

2. The longer God is pleaſed to bear with us, and wait for our Repentance, the more ſeverely will he handle us at laſt, if ſtill we refuſe to be reclaimed. Long-continued and abuſed Patience uſually ends in Fury. *I kept ſilence*, ſaid God to the wicked Man, the obſtinate Sinner that would not be reclaimed; I had long Patience with him: *And thou thoughteſt that I was ſuch a one as thy ſelf*; My Forbearance of thee made thee think

think that I was much of thy mind, and had no great diſlike of thy evil Ways: *But I will reprove thee, and ſet thy Sins in order before thee. Conſider this, ye that forget God, leſt I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you.* As if he had ſaid, Though I have born long with thee, yet thou art much miſtaken if thou thinkeſt that I will always bear with thee: The longer I ſtay, the more terrible and irreſiſtible will my Judgments be when I reckon with thee, and come upon thee at laſt. Pſal. 50. 21, 22.

Uſe 2. If God be pleaſed to call Sinners to Repentance, and to give them Warning before he puniſhes them; then let all ſuch as are puniſhed, juſtify God, and acknowledg that they ſuffer juſtly, and that they have no reaſon to complain of God, but of themſelves: For having offended, and deſerved Puniſhment, God gave them Warning before he would correct them; but they would not take Warning. If they be puniſhed, they may thank themſelves; they might by their Repentance have prevented it, but they would not.

Uſe

Uſe 3. The ſame Conſideration ſhould alſo perſwade Sufferers to bear with Patience what God is pleaſed to lay upon them for their Sins. They have wilfully made themſelves Sufferers, and drawn thoſe Evils upon themſelves, which God would never have inflicted on them, if any Warnings would have made them ſenſible of their Danger, and have reclaimed them; if any Calls and Invitations to Repentance, and Offers of Mercy would have prevailed with them, taken them off from their ſinful Courſes, and gained them. Is there not all the reaſon in the World, that they ſhould undergo with Patience thoſe Evils which they would bring upon themſelves, notwithſtanding all the Means which God made uſe of to keep
Hab. 2. 10. them off? *Thou haſt conſulted Shame to thy Houſe*, ſaid God to the King of *Babylon*. When impenitent Sinners will take no Warnings, when they will not be perſwaded to take that Courſe by which alone Puniſhments may be prevented, they conſult Puniſhments to themſelves. Whatever a Man ſuffers, he may ſay to himſelf as God ſaid to his
Jer. 4. 18. People, *Thy Way and thy Doings have*

pro-

procured theſe things unto thee. He that ſhall conſider this, cannot but acknowledg that his Impatience under God's afflicting Hand is moſt unreaſonable.

II. Another Obſervation from God's ſpeaking to *Manaſſeh* and his People, from his forewarning them of approaching Judgments, and calling them to Repentance, is, *That God is pleaſed to give warning to the greateſt Sinners before he puniſheth them, and to call them to Repentance, that they may uſe the Means for eſcaping thoſe his Judgments, which without Repentance will inevitably overtake them, and come upon them.* Such a Sinner was *Manaſſeh*, whoſe monſtrous Wickedneſs and horrid Abominations we have in part been acquainted with before. And as for his People, we may well ſuppoſe that they alſo were prodigiouſly wicked, and ripe for the Sickle, for the Sickle of the Wrath of God, ſeeing many of them muſt needs concur with *Manaſſeh* in thoſe his Sins, and were together with him jointly threatned with thoſe terrible Judgments that are mentioned, 2 *Kings* 21. So then both *Manaſſeh* and his People had arrived at a fearful pitch of Wickedneſs: and

and yet as wicked as they were, God gives them fair Quarter; he warns them before he will pour out the Vials of his Wrath upon them, and calls them to Repentance, that they might not ſay when his Judgments ſhould take hold of them, that they would have repented if they had known the Danger they were in, and ſufficient Warning had been given them in ſeaſon. The Age before the Flood was deſperately wicked, inſomuch that it's ſaid, *It repented*
Gen. 6. 6. *the Lord that he had made Man on the Earth, and that it grieved him at the Heart:* So is God pleaſed to ſet forth the Wickedneſs of Mankind in thoſe Times, ſpeaking after the manner of Men. So again 'tis afterwards ſaid,
Ver. 12, 13 that *all Fleſh had corrupted his Way upon the Earth, and that the Earth was filled with Violence.* And yet tho Mankind had ſo wofully degenerated, and the World was ſo fearfully corrupted, and ſo univerſally depraved, that only eight Perſons, *Noah* and his Family, were preſerved; yet God did not preſently ſweep them all away with the Beeſom of Deſtruction, but gave them warning
Ver. 3. of the Flood 120 Years before it came, and waited for their Repentance all the while

while that the Ark was a preparing. The Jews were desperately wicked before the Captivity, as by the Descriptions of their grievous Sins, and universal Corruption, which we meet with in the Prophets, may be seen; and yet God did not immediately call for their Enemies to fall upon them, and carry them away Captives, but raised up and sent them many Prophets to forewarn them of the Captivity, and call upon them for Humiliation and Reformation, that the Miseries threatned might not come upon them. The Wickedness of the *Ninivites* was great, and came up before God; and yet God would not presently destroy them, but gave them Warning by the Prophet *Jonah*, sent to them on purpose, who cried and solemnly proclaimed in the City, saying, *Yet forty Days and* Niniveh *shall be overthrown*. How extreamly wicked and universally corrupt the Jewish State was immediately before the coming of Christ, is evident from the Prophecy of *Malachi*, the last of the Prophets; and yet the fatal Day of their Visitation did not presently come upon them and surprize them; but our Saviour by his Preaching called them to Repentance,

1 Pet. 3. 20.

Jonah 1. 2.

Jonah 3. 4.

and forewarned them of the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, and the Miſeries attending it. Now the Reaſons of this Point are the ſame with thoſe of the former; he calls the greater Sinners to Repentance, and forewarns them of the dangerous and fearful Conſequents of their continued and final Impenitency, that he may thereby bring them to Repentance, and prevent their Puniſhment, if it may be; or that in caſe they repent not, they may be rendred inexcuſable, and that the Righteouſneſs of his Severity againſt them when he reckons with them, may be juſtified and cleared.

But you may here object againſt what hath been ſaid; Doth not God often ſurprize wicked Men with his Judgments? Doth not his Wrath fall upon them on a ſudden many times, and when they leaſt fear it? Doth it not often take hold of them in the height of their carnal Security, and when they do not ſo much as dream of any Danger they are in? And is not this to be ſuddenly and unexpectedly ſurprized by his terrible Judgments? So the Deſtruction of
Prov. 1. 27. wicked Men cometh as a Whirl-wind; that is, both ſuddenly and irreſiſtibly.

So

So Chriſt, ſpeaking of the laſt Judgment at the End of the World, ſaith, that *as a Snare it ſhall come on all them that dwell on the Face of the whole Earth.* It ſhould ſuddenly and unexpectedly ſurprize them, as the Bird is ſurprized that is taken in the Snare. So again, 1 *Theſſ.* 5. 2, 3.—*The Day of the Lord ſo cometh as a Thief in the Night. For when they ſhall ſay, Peace and Safety, then ſudden Deſtruction cometh upon them, as Travail upon a Woman with Child; and they ſhall not eſcape.* Luke 21. 35.

To this I anſwer, That theſe, and divers other Scriptures to the ſame purpoſe, are no way contrary to what hath been ſaid concerning God's giving Warning to the greateſt Sinners, and his calling to Repentance before he puniſheth. For,

1. That wicked Men are often ſuddenly overtaken and ſurprized with God's terrible Judgments, is not for want of being warned, but becauſe they will not take Warning: Though they be told from Day to Day of the Judgments of God that ſeem to be even at the Door, and ready to light upon them, yet they will not believe it; and ſo whenſoever the Judgments of God come

upon them, they are ſurprized; and they come when they think not of them, when they look not for them.

2. 'Tis moſt juſt with God that they who have contemned many former Warnings, and would take no Warnings, ſhould at laſt have no Warning. And this is that which is expreſly threatned, *Rev.* 3. 2, 3. where Chriſt ſpeaking to the Angel of the Church in *Sardis*, ſaith, *Be watchful, and ſtrengthen the things that are ready to die, for I have not found thy Works perfect before God: Remember therefore how thou haſt received and heard, and hold faſt and repent.* Here is Warning ſufficient: If therefore thou ſhalt not watch, *I will come on thee as a Thief, and thou ſhalt not know what Hour I will come upon thee.* That is in Effect, If thou wilt take no Warning, when I at length come upon thee to puniſh thee, thou ſhalt have no Warning. And ſo much by way of Anſwer to that Objection.

Now to apply very briefly what hath been ſaid concerning this Obſervation.

Uſe 1. If God be graciouſly pleaſed to call the greateſt Sinners to Repentance, and to give them Warning before

fore he puniſheth them, then have the greateſt Sinners abundant Incouragement to come in to God, and to indeavour to make their Peace with him, how long ſoever they have ſtood out againſt him: They may be ſure God would never call them to repent, and invite them to come in to him, unleſs he were moſt willing to entertain them, and bid them welcome when they come. Far be it from you to harbour ſuch unworthy and diſhonourable Thoughts of God, as if he would invite you to come in to him, and then reject you and caſt you off when you do come. Whatever your Sins have been, they ſhall not hinder your being reconciled to him, and your making your Peace with him, if at length you lay down your Arms that you have taken up againſt him, and caſt your ſelf upon his Mercy. But then,

1*ſt*. You muſt do it ſincerely and cordially; you may not dally with God, pretending to lay down your Arms to Day, and taking them up again to Morrow. If you expect to find Mercy with him, you muſt return to him with your whole Heart, and not feignedly.

2*dly*. You muſt come in to him ſpeedily, you muſt do it immediately. He that ſaith he will repent hereafter, he will repent to Morrow, doth not repent to Day; and for ought he knows may be in another World before the Morrow cometh.

Uſe 2. If God be graciouſly pleaſed to call the greateſt Sinners to Repentance; then let us not utterly deſpair of any whom God calls; let us not be diſcouraged from uſing Means for the Converſion of any, for whoſe Converſion God is ſtill uſing Means; let us not be weary of waiting for the Converſion of any, for whoſe Converſion God is ſtill waiting.

There are two things that in this Caſe uſually diſcourage us, and make us weary of uſing Means for the reclaiming of Sinners.

1*ſt*. If Means have been long uſed, and no Good hath been done upon them, no Change for the better hath appeared in them.

2*dly*. If, as ſometimes it is, the Means that have been made uſe of for reclaiming them, and reducing them from the Error of their ways, have made them worſe,

worſe, more obdurate, more obſtinate, more oppoſite to what is offered them, and laid before them for their Good. When thus it is, we are very apt to ſay, To what Purpoſe ſhould any further Indeavours be uſed for gaining them who will not be gained, and on whom all Labour that is beſtowed is loſt? But notwithſtanding all this, if God be ſtill pleaſed to call upon them to return, though they turn the deaf Ear to all his Calls, why ſhould we think it much to be ſtill calling on them? Though they hitherto ſtop their Ears, yet God can bore and open their Ears when he pleaſeth; and we know not but that he may yet ſhew Mercy to them in conquering them and ſubduing them to himſelf by his Grace, how long ſoever and how obſtinately ſoever they have perſiſted in their Impenitency: wherefore let us go on to do our Duty in order to their reclaiming, and let God do what ſeemeth good in his Eyes.

So I have done with the firſt Particular in the Text; God's great Mercy to *Manaſſeh* and his People that had ſo highly provoked him; he was graciouſly pleaſed to call them to Repentance, and to give them Warning of

thoſe Evils that were approaching, and would certainly overtake them, and come upon them if they ſhould ſtill perſevere in their ſinful Courſes. How much ſoever they had provoked him, he would not bring his Judgments upon them till he had firſt dealt with them by his Prophets, to make them ſenſible of their Danger, and to bring them to Repentance.

Now followeth the ſecond Particular, the Impenitency and Obſtinacy of *Manaſſeh* and his People; *They would not hearken.* 'Tis not ſaid, They did not hearken, but *they would not hearken.* Which Words imply a wilful diſregarding and rejecting of thoſe Admonitions, Reproofs and Warnings that were given them by the Prophets.

Whence we may obſerve;

That wicked Men that have long gone on in a Courſe of Sin, come ſometimes to that Degree of Obſtinacy and Hardneſs of Heart, that no Calls or Invitations to Repentance, no Warnings of impending and approaching Judgments will work upon them.

This their Obſtinacy is many ways ſet forth and repreſented to us in the holy

holy Scriptures. The Pſalmiſt compares ſuch wicked Men to *the deaf Adder, that ſtoppeth her Ears, and will not hearken to the Voice of the Charmer, charming never ſo wiſely:* The meaning is, nothing can be ſo fitly ſpoken, but that they refuſe to hearken to it. And as they ſtop their Ears, ſo they cloſe their Eyes; *When thy Hand is lifted up, they will not ſee.* So of the perverſe and obſtinate Jews that lived in the Prophet *Zechariah*'s time, 'tis ſaid, that *they refuſed to hearken, and pulled away the Shoulder, and ſtopped their Ears, that they ſhould not hear: Yea, they made their Hearts as an Adamant Stone.* Of this Unteachableneſs and Obſtinacy of Spirit God complains, ſaying, *My People would not hearken to my Voice, and* Iſrael *would none of me.* To the ſame Effect is that moſt affectionate Speech of our Saviour, *O* Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, *how often would I have gathered thy Children together, even as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings, and ye would not?* Yea ſometimes ſo far are wicked Men from hearkning to thoſe gracious Calls and merciful Invitations to Repentance which God vouchſafeth them, that they cannot endure any Man that ſhall

Pſal. 58. 4, 5.

Iſa. 26. 11.

Zech. 7. 11, 12.

Pſal. 81. 11

Matth. 23. 37.

ſhall indeavour to make them ſenſible of their evil Ways, and to withdraw them from their Sins. Upon this Account it was that *Ahab* counted *Elijah* his Enemy: *Haſt thou found me, O mine Enemy?* ſaid he, when the Prophet came to reprove him, and to denounce the Judgments of God againſt him and his Family for their Sins. And ſo impatient were ungodly Men of being reproved in the Prophet *Iſaiah*'s time, that they ſtudied to do what Miſchief they could to ſuch as ſhould attempt to reprove them: *They make a Man an Offender for a Word, and lay a Snare for him that reproveth in the Gate,* ſaith that Prophet. The like Complaint we have, *Amos* 5. 10. *They hate him that rebuketh in the Gate, and abhor him that ſpeaketh uprightly.* Now there are ſeveral things that make wicked Men the more obſtinate, and that are, if not Cauſes, yet Occaſions of their turning the deaf Ear to all thoſe Calls and Invitations to Repentance, which God vouchſafeth them. Such as are,

1 Kings 21. 20.

Iſa. 29. 21.

1*ſt.* Outward Proſperity. When the World ſmiles upon them, when they live at Eaſe, and injoy whatever Heart can wiſh; this through the Corruption of

of their Hearts puffs them up with Pride, and makes them ſlight whatever is offered them, or laid before them for the Good of their Souls. This ill Effect had outward Proſperity upon *Jehojachin*; *I ſpake unto thee in thy Proſperity, and thou ſaidſt, I will not hear.* To the ſame Purpoſe is that of the Pſalmiſt, who ſpeaking of wicked Men, ſaith, *Becauſe they have no Changes, therefore they fear not God.* Becauſe they are not haraſſed with Afflictions, nor emptied from Veſſel to Veſſel, therefore they regard not God's Calls to Repentance, nor his Threatnings: He may ſay what he pleaſeth, he may threaten them as ſeverely as he will, they are not moved at it, nor concern themſelves with it.

Jer. 22. 21.

Pſal. 55. 19

2dly. Another thing that makes them the more obſtinate, is, their not believing the Threatnings and Denunciations of Judgments againſt them for their Sins. Thus the old World not believing what God had threatned concerning the Deſtruction of the World by the Flood, ſtill continued in their Sins, and repented not, till at length the Flood came upon them, and took them all away, excepting only thoſe few Perſons

ſons that found Grace in the Eyes of God to be exempted from that dreadful Judgment. So though God had often by his Prophets threatned the Captivity, yet the profane and obſtinate Jews putting far off the evil Day, and giving no Credit to the Threatnings, would not be brought to Repentance. Such were they whom the Prophet *Zephany* deſcribed, who being ſetled on their
Zeph. 1. 12. Lees, ſaid in their Hearts, *The Lord will not do Good, neither will he do Evil:* that is, he would neither fulfil his Promiſes, nor make good his Threatnings; they believed neither the one nor the other.

3dly. Another thing that makes wicked Men the more obſtinate, and that hardens them againſt all Invitations and Calls to Repentance, is the abuſed Patience and Long-ſufferance of God towards them: Becauſe God hath long born with them, therefore they think he will always bear with them; becauſe waiting for their Repentance, he doth not ſpeedily put his Threatnings in Execution, therefore they make account he will never put them in Execu-
Eccleſ. 8. 11. tion. *Becauſe Sentence againſt an evil Work is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the*

the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully ſet in them to do Evil. If Puniſhment be but deferred and reſpited for a time, to ſee if Offenders will not bethink themſelves, and by their Repentance prevent that Severity which elſe muſt be uſed againſt them, even this makes them think they are now in no Danger of being puniſhed, and ſo they are incouraged to go on in their Sins. Thus the wicked Jews incouraged themſelves in their ſinful Courſes, and in their carnal Security, ſaying; *The Days are prolonged, and every Viſion faileth.* As if they had ſaid, the Prophets terrify us with ſad Viſions, and ſevere Threatnings and Denunciations of approaching Judgments; but nothing comes of it, all their Viſions fail, and we are ſtill in Safety, and ſo we truſt we ſhall be, notwithſtanding all the Frights they would put us into. Ezek. 12. 22.

4thly. Another thing, and indeed the chief thing that makes wicked Men ſo obſtinate as that they ſtop their Ears againſt all Solicitations and Calls to Repentance, is the moſt intire League that there is between them and their Sins: So dearly do they love their Sins, that they cannot indure to think of parting with

with them. Whatever can be ſaid to take them off from their Sins, is of no Account, ſignifies nothing with them; injoy their Sins they will, whatever comes of it: They are perfectly deaf to all Charmings that tend to the making a Separation between them and their Luſts. Thus were the Jews ſo fondly in love with the idolatrous Services of foreign Nations, that after them they would, nothing ſhould withhold them:

Jer. 2. 25. *I have loved Strangers,* ſaith *Judah, and after them will I go.* Now to apply very briefly what hath been ſaid concerning this Point.

Uſe 1. If wicked Men that have long gone on in a Courſe of Sin, may and do ſometimes come to ſuch a Degree of Obſtinacy and Hardneſs of Heart, that no Admonitions, no Reproofs, no Invitations or Calls to Repentance, no Warnings of approaching Judgments will work upon them, then let no Man that treats with Men about the Concernments of their Souls, think it ſtrange if he ſometimes meet with ſuch Men. The World is full of ſuch Men, and ever hath been. The Prophets and Apoſtles, and our Saviour Chriſt himſelf, had

had to do with ſuch Men: And theſe later Ages of the World are not better.

But you will ſay, What's to be done when we meet with ſuch Men? Muſt we let them alone, becauſe as far as we can ſee, they are ſuch as hate Inſtruction, and caſt the Words of God behind their back, as the wicked Man is deſcribed, *Pſal.* 50. 17.

I anſwer, No. For,

1. We know not Mens Hearts; and therefore though they ſeem to be obſtinate and incorrigible, yet there may be ſome Convictions within, and ſome ſecret Relentings that we cannot diſcern.

2. If they ſhould really be as obſtinate and incorrigible as they ſeem to be, and much worſe, yet God can work upon them, and change their Hearts, if he pleaſe. No Heart is ſo hard but he can ſoften it; no Heart is ſo obſtinate but he can ſubdue it. Wherefore God laid an expreſs Charge upon *Ezekiel* to ſpeak to a perverſe and obſtinate People, though in all Probability his Labour would be loſt upon them: Thou Son of Man *ſhalt ſpeak my Words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, for they are a rebellious* Ezek. 2. 7.

Houſe.

Houſe. And this he is enjoined to do with all Freedom and Boldneſs, notwithſtanding all the Enmity and fierce Oppoſition which he might thereby procure from ſuch wicked and unreaſonable Men as they were with whom he had to do. *Thou Son of Man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their Words, though Briars and Thorns be with thee, and thou doſt dwell among Scorpions; be not afraid of their VVords, nor be diſmayed at their Looks, though they be a rebellious Houſe.* And ſo the Prophet *Iſaiah*, who had to do with the ſame perverſe and obſtinate People, muſt deliver his Meſſage, though God in effect told him before-hand, That no Good was to be done upon them, they would rather be worſe than better by all that he ſhould ſay to them: *Go and tell this People*, ſaith he, *Hear ye indeed, but underſtand not; and ſee ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the Heart of this People fat, and make their Ears heavy, and ſhut their Eyes; leſt they ſee with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and underſtand with their Heart, and convert and be healed.* Speak he muſt unto them, though God foreſhewed that this would be the Effect of all his Indeavours with them for their Good.

Ezek. 2. 6.

Iſa. 6. 9, 10.

Uſe

Uſe 2. If wicked Men that have long gone on in a Courſe of Sin, may come at length to that degree of Obſtinacy and hardneſs of Heart, that no Admonitions, no Reproofs, no Calls or Invitations to Repentance, no Warnings of approaching Judgments will work upon them; how great a Mercy then is it, and ought it to be acknowledged, if God be pleaſed to give any Man a ſoft and tender Heart, an humble and teachable Spirit; if there be a Willingneſs to attend to wholſom Counſels, a Willingneſs to be inſtructed, to be admoniſhed, and when need is to be reproved; if God be pleaſed ſo to frame a Man's Heart, and ſo to break and take down his Spirit, as that he can take Admonitions and Reproofs in good part, as that he can receive them patiently and thankfully, as that he can ſay with *David*, *Let the Righteous ſmite me, it ſhall be a Kindneſs; let him reprove me, it ſhall be an excellent Oil which ſhall not break my Head?* 'Tis certainly matter of great Thankfulneſs, if God be pleaſed to give any Man ſuch a Frame of Heart, ſuch a Temper of Spirit: If it be thus with you, if Counſels, Admonitions Pſal. 141. 5

monitions and Reproofs upon juſt Occaſions are welcome and acceptable to you; if you cannot only ſubmit to them patiently, but gladly and thankfully entertain them, and bleſs God for them. Conſider, God might have given you up to as great a meaſure of Obſtinacy and Perverſeneſs as that of the moſt obdurate and refractory Perſon in the World, that ſcorns to be admoniſhed, that hates Inſtruction, and is ready to fly in the Face of any Man that ſhall reprove him. Your Spirit might have riſen, and tumultuated within you as impetuouſly; your Corruption might have boiled up, and run over as violently againſt any Man that ſhould endeavour to make you ſenſible of your Sin, as his that is moſt impatient of Reproof, or of whatever elſe might conduce to the Good of his Soul. Say therefore to your ſelf, Who maketh thee to differ from another? Haſt thou not the ſame natural Corruption that the very worſt, the moſt obſtinate Sinners have? And who is it that reſtrains that Corruption in thee, and keeps it from breaking out in the moſt fierce and violent Oppoſition againſt Reproof and Chriſtian Admonition, but he that hath *placed the Sand*

for

for the bound of the Sea, by a perpetual Decree that it cannot paſs it? and though the Waves thereof toſs themſelves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not paſs over it, as the Prophet ſpeaks. Jer. 5. 22.

Uſe 3. If wicked Men that have long gone on in a Courſe of Sin, may come at length to that degree of Obſtinacy and hardneſs of Heart, as that no Admonitions or Reproofs, no Calls or Invitations to Repentance, no Warnings of approaching Judgments will work upon them; then let all impenitent Sinners take heed how they ſtill perſevere in their evil Ways, leſt by degrees they come to this woful Eſtate, that nothing that can be ſaid to them will move them at all, or do them any Good, will rouze them up, or awaken them to Repentance. This is a moſt lamentable Condition, a moſt fearful Eſtate, an Eſtate to be trembled at: And yet in this fearful Eſtate will your Perſeverance in your evil Ways at length end. Wherefore let me intreat you to endeavour to break off your Sins by Righteouſneſs, as *Daniel* counſelled *Nebuchadnezzar* to do, to break off your Sins ſpeedily while Dan. 4. 27.

there is any ſenſe of Sin, any little Tenderneſs of Conſcience yet remaining; before your Heart be ſo hardned, as that *you be paſt feeling*; before your Conſci-
2 Tim. 4. 2. ence comes to be *ſeared as with an hot Iron*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks; before you
Rom. 1. 28. be *given up to a reprobate Mind*, as again the ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks.

Now to the end we may never be thus given up, let us endeavour to be always ready and willing to hear whatſoever God ſhall be pleaſed to ſpeak, whoever be the Inſtruments by whom he ſpeaks to us: Let us endeavour to have both our Ears and our Hearts open to take in and receive whatſoever Counſels, Admonitions, Reproofs or Warnings ſhall be given us from him. And here let us conſider;

1. That 'tis a thing moſt pleaſing and acceptable to God, when a Man is not regardleſs of what he ſpeaks, but ſeriouſly minds it, takes it to Heart, and is affected with it. *To this Man*
Iſa. 66. 2. *will I look*, ſaith he, *even to him that is poor, and of a contrite Spirit, and that trembleth at my Word.* A moſt remarkable Inſtance of the gracious Reſpect that God hath to this Frame of Spirit, is that which is recorded in 2 *Kings* 22.

There

There we find that when *Shaphan* the Scribe had read the Book of the Law, that had been found in the Houſe of the Lord, before *Joſiah* the King, and all the Curſes and Threatnings contained therein, as we may ſuppoſe; *Joſiah* took it ſo to Heart, that he rent his Clothes, and ſent immediately to enquire of the Lord for himſelf, for the People, and for all *Judah*, concerning the Words of the Book: *For*, ſaid he, *great is the Wrath of the Lord that is kindled againſt us, becauſe our Fathers have not hearkned to the Words of this Book, to do according to all that is written therein concerning us.* So deeply was *Joſiah* affected with what God had threatned againſt that People for their Sins. But now how did God take it at his Hands, that he was thus affected? This you may ſee in the Anſwer which *Huldah* the Propheteſs, of whom he enquired, returned him at *ver.* 18, 19, 20. where ſhe having aſſured that People, that whatſoever Evils God had threatned ſhould certainly come upon them, ſhe adds, with reference to *Joſiah*, a very gracious Anſwer from the Lord: *But to the King of* Judah *which ſent you to enquire of the Lord, thus ſhall ye ſay to him*, ſaith ſhe; *Thus* Ver. 11, 12, 13.

ſaith the Lord God of Iſrael, *As touching the VVords which thou haſt heard; becauſe thine Heart was tender, and thou haſt humbled thy ſelf before the Lord, when thou heardeſt what I ſpake againſt this Place, and againſt the Inhabitants thereof, that they ſhould become a Deſolation and a Curſe; and haſt rent thy Clothes, and wept before me; I alſo have heard thee, ſaith the Lord: Behold therefore I will gather thee unto thy Fathers, and thou ſhalt be gathered into thy Grave in Peace, and thine Eyes ſhall not ſee all the Evil which I will bring upon this Place.*

2. Conſider, that to ſtop a Man's Ears, and to harden a Man's Heart againſt ſuch Counſels, Admonitions and Warnings, as God is pleaſed to give him, is a thing highly diſpleaſing to him, as from the Scriptures afore-cited appears.

I now go on to the third Particular in my Text, the Courſe which God was further pleaſed to take with *Manaſſeh* in order to his reclaiming, when gracious Calls and Invitations to Repentance, and Warnings of approaching Judgments would not prevail. The Lord brought upon them the Captains of the Hoſt of the King of *Aſſyria*, which took

Manaſſeh

Manaſſeh among the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to *Babylon.*

Whence we may obſerve,

That when other Means prove ineffectual for the reclaiming of impenitent and obſtinate Sinners, God is pleaſed to make uſe of Afflictions.

'Tis true, God can effectually reclaim and convert the moſt ſtubborn and obſtinate, the moſt obdurate and hard-hearted Sinners without Afflictions. He needs not take the Rod in hand to do his Work upon them. He that made Hearts, can remake them; he can change and renew them when he pleaſeth, and how he pleaſeth. He can do it by Means, and he can do it without Means. He can create and infuſe Grace in an Inſtant; he can in the twinkling of an Eye, without the Intervention or Service of any created Inſtrument, tranſform the filthieſt, the moſt loathſom and abominable Sinner into a Saint, a Devil into an Angel of Light. There is nothing too hard for him, who being Omnipotent, can do whatſoever he pleaſeth. But yet however, ordinarily he makes uſe of Afflictions for humbling and reclaiming obſtinate Sinners, when

other Means prevail not. And seeing he doth make use of Afflictions, we must conclude that he judgeth that the best and fittest Course, for otherwise he would not make choice of it. We may perhaps in favour to our selves, be apt to think this great Work might be much better effected without Afflictions. Our carnal Wisdom may apprehend that it would more conduce to the exalting and magnifying of God's Power and Goodness, if this great Work of changing and renewing the Hearts of obstinate Sinners were effected by the immediate Hand of God, and the powerful Operation of his Spirit on the Heart, without the Suffering, the Smart, or Durance of the Sinner. But alas! who are we that we should presume to oppose our foolish Reasonings against his Infinite Wisdom? Whatever our dark, selfish and partial Reason may suggest to the contrary, that must needs be the best and fittest Course that could be taken which God hath pitched on: no better Course could be thought on, no wiser Method could be devised for bringing Sinners to Repentance, and for working a Change in them, than that which he hath made choice of. When

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we have conſidered the Matter, this we muſt of neceſſity grant, unleſs we will make our ſelves wiſer than God, unleſs we will take upon us to dictate and preſcribe to him a better way than he hath contrived.

Now for the Proof and Confirmation of this Point, that God is pleaſed to make uſe of Afflictions for the reclaiming of obſtinate Sinners, when other Means prevail not, I need not ſay much; our own Experience is a ſufficient Confirmation thereof. There is no Man that hath obſerved God's Dealings with the Sons of Men, but muſt have taken notice that nothing is more ordinary in the Courſe of God's Providence, than to bring them home to himſelf by Afflictions, who will not otherwiſe be reduced from the Error of their ways. And as he takes this Courſe with wicked Men to convert them, ſo he takes the ſame Courſe with his Children to recal them, and to bring them into the right way again when they have gone aſtray. This was the Courſe which he took with *David*, as he himſelf acknowledgeth: *Before I was afflicted I went aſtray, but now I keep thy Word.* And again; *It is good for me that I have been afflicted,* Pſal. 119. 67. Ver. 71.

afflicted, that I might learn thy Statutes. He means, that he might ſo learn God's Statutes as to practiſe them, and frame his Life and Converſation according to them.

Now to apply this Truth briefly.

Uſe 1. If God be pleaſed to make uſe of Afflictions for reclaiming and reducing Sinners, when other Means will not prevail; then if Men be wiſe, and if they would prevent and keep off Afflictions, it concerns them to improve thoſe other Means which God makes uſe of; I mean, Inſtructions, Admonitions, Reproofs and Warnings, humbling themſelves for their Sins, and reforming their Lives, that ſo God may not bring thoſe Afflictions upon them which will be grievous to them. What Folly and Madneſs is it when Men will put God to lay ſore and grievous things upon them, becauſe they will not be wrought upon by gentler Means? *Solomon* ſaith, *A Reproof entreth more into a wiſe Man, than an hundred Stripes into a Fool.* So then in the Judgment of *Solomon*, he is a wiſe Man into whom a Reproof enters; that is, on whom it makes

Prov. 17. 10.

makes Impreſſions, and by whom it is entertained and improved: but *he that hateth Reproof is brutiſh.* Prov. 12. 1. He is ſo far from being a wiſe Man, that he is ſcarce a Man; he is more like a Brute than a Man; he underſtands not his own Intereſt, which is to take Reproofs to Heart, to be affected with them, and to make a good Uſe of them, and not by rejecting them to draw thoſe Evils upon himſelf which he might avoid if he would. Conſider this, you that are now admoniſhed, reproved and warned, but will not hearken: Do you know what you do? As much as in you lies, you put the Rod into God's Hand to correct you ſeverely, and to make you ſmart ſorely, to try if that Courſe may not take better Effect upon you than thoſe milder Courſes which he hath hitherto taken with you. Why ſhould you conſult and procure Sorrow, Sufferings and Smart to your ſelf? How much better had it been for *Manaſſeh* to have hearkned to the Meſſage of the Lord, brought to him by the Prophets, and not by his Diſobedience and Obſtinacy to have procured the Captains of the Hoſt of the King of *Aſſyria* to be ſent againſt him, *to bind him with Fetters,*

ters, and carry him to Babylon? When we ſuffer for our Sins, then we condemn and cry out againſt our ſelves, that we ſhould be ſo fooliſhly obſtinate as not to hearken to good Counſel when time was, whereby we might have prevented our Sufferings. But ſo it is, that in things of this Nature we ſeldom learn Wit till we have bought it, and paid dearly for it.

Uſe 2. If God be pleaſed to make uſe of Afflictions to reclaim and reduce Sinners when other Means will not prevail, then let ſuch as are afflicted be careful that they do not impatiently murmur, and fret againſt the Lord who correcteth them. For,

1. They may thank themſelves that they are corrected; they have been the Authors and Procurers of their own Sufferings. If they would have been humbled and reformed by gentler Means, there would have been no need of thoſe ſeverer Courſes which now are taken with them. God is not forward to correct; he takes no ſuch Delight in correcting, as to take the Rod in Hand when there is no need of it. He doth not afflict willingly; he never doth it but

but when there is great Cauſe for it, and our obſtinate Perſeverance in our Sins againſt all other Means makes Correction neceſſary.

2. They have ſo little Reaſon to fret and murmur againſt God for correcting them, that they have great Cauſe to be thankful to God for his Care of them, and that he doth not leave them now to themſelves, and ſuffer them to go on in their Sins to their Ruine, ſeeing they refuſe to hearken to him, and harden their Hearts againſt all good Counſels, Admonitions, Reproofs and Warnings by which he hath ſolicited and provoked them to Repentance. Having found them ſo perverſe and refractory, how juſtly might he now rid his Hands of them, look no more after them, but *give them up to their own Hearts Luſt*; Pſal. 81. 12 *and let them alone to walk in their own Counſels*; as in the like Caſe he dealt with *Iſrael?* 'Tis an Argument of his great Love to them, that he will make Trial of all ſorts of Means whereby they may be brought to Repentance, before he will utterly caſt them off, and meddle no more with them, or concern himſelf any further about their Good.

Uſe

Uſe 3. If God be pleaſed to make uſe of Afflictions for reclaiming and reducing of Sinners, when other Means prevail not, then let ſuch as are afflicted indeavour to comply with God's Deſign in afflicting them. They would not be won by gentler Means, and therefore now God is trying whether his Rod may not effect that Good in them which his Word alone would not. Be not ſo obſtinate and refractory as to render all Means ineffectual which God makes uſe of for reclaiming you, as to defeat and fruſtrate the Deſign of all thoſe Methods of his Wiſdom and Goodneſs by which you might be gained, and be brought home to him. Labour to anſwer God's End in correcting you, and be perſwaded to hear the Rod, as
Mich. 6. 9. God by the Prophet enjoins. Although you have ſtopped your Ears againſt the Word; let not the ſame Complaint be taken up againſt you that was taken up by the Prophet againſt the Jews: *O*
Jer. 5. 3. *Lord, are not thine Eyes upon the Truth? thou haſt ſtricken them, but they have not grieved; thou haſt conſumed them, but they have refuſed to receive Correction; they have made their Faces harder than a Rock,*

Rock, they have refuſed to return. Search after, and indeavour to find out the Sins for which God hath a Controverſy with you; be truly humbled for them, earneſtly ſeek unto God for the Pardon of them; caſt them off, and forſake them. If God's Chaſtiſements take you not off from your Sins; if no Severities will imbitter them to you, and make you willing to leave them, then what remains but that God ſhould look upon you as an incorrigible Perſon, as one whoſe Diſeaſe is incurable, and ſo leave you to periſh in your Iniquity? Thus God left *Ephraim* to take the Courſe which pleaſed him, when it appeared that his Heart was ſo ſet upon his Idols, that nothing would bring him out of love with them: Ephraim *is joined to Idols, let him alone.* To be thus let alone, is that indeed which wicked Men would have; they would ſtill gratify their Luſts, go on in their Sins quietly, and not be diſturbed in the Enjoyment of them. This is in their Account the greateſt Happineſs: but 'tis indeed the moſt dreadful Effect of God's higheſt Indignation againſt them. It were a thouſand times better, and more eligible, that all the Calamities

Hoſ. 4. 17.

and

and Miſeries in the World ſhould light upon a Man, than that God ſhould ſay of him, He is an obſtinate and incorrigible Sinner, he is one that will not be reformed by any thing that I have ſaid or done; wherefore let him alone, let him take his Fill of Sin, he ſhall have no more Diſturbance from me till I come to reckon with him once for all. Do you not tremble at the fearful State of ſuch a Man? If you do not, you juſtly may. O take heed leſt by your ſtubborn and obſtinate Perſeverance in your Sins againſt all Means for reclaiming you, you at length bring your ſelf into it.

And this may ſuffice to have been ſpoken concerning that Point. The Point which I have now laſt ſpoken to, was but general, as ariſing from the Conſideration of the Courſe, in general, which God took with *Manaſſeh* for humbling and reclaiming him: when gentler Means did no Good upon him, God made uſe of Afflictions.

I come to a more particular Conſideration of that Affliction which God was pleaſed to lay upon him; *The Lord brought upon them*, upon him and his People, *the Captains of the Hoſt of the King*

King of Aſſyria, *and they took* Manaſſeh *among the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to* Babylon. And here;

1*ſt.* Whereas 'tis ſaid, that *the Lord brought upon them the Captains of the Hoſt of the King of* Aſſyria,

We may obſerve, That 'tis of God that one Nation makes War againſt another; that one Country invades another, and ſubjects it to all the Miſeries and Calamities of the Sword. This is frequently in the holy Scriptures aſcribed to the over-ruling Providence of God, and that not only in way of mere Permiſſion, but ſo as God is made in ſome Senſe the Author and Procurer of Wars and Invaſions, and the Inflicter of all the Miſeries that attend them. Here the Lord is ſaid to have brought upon *Manaſſeh* and his People the Captains of the Hoſt of the King of *Aſſyria.* Thus in 2 *Kings* 24. 2, 3, 4. we read, that *the Lord ſent againſt* Jehoiakim *Bands of the* Chaldees, *and Bands of the* Syrians, *and Bands of the* Moabites, *and Bands of the Children of* Ammon; *and that he ſent them againſt* Judah *to deſtroy it, according to the Word that he had ſpoken by his Servants the Prophets.*

And by way of further Confirmation that all this was of God, it follows in the next Words, *Surely at the Commandment of the Lord came this upon* Judah, *to remove them out of his Sight, for the Sins of* Manaſſeh. And thus is God
1 Kings 11. 14. ſaid to have ſtirred up *Hadad* the *Edomite* againſt *Solomon*: and to have *ſtirred*
Ver. 23. *up another Adverſary againſt him*, Rezon *the Son of* Eliadah. So God, ſpeaking of the Executioners of his Juſtice whom he would make uſe of to puniſh his
Iſa. 5. 26. People, ſaith, he would *lift up an Enſign to the Nations from far, and that he would hiſs unto them from the Ends of the Earth, that they might come with Speed ſwiftly.* So again, ſpeaking of his calling for other Nations to invade the
Iſa. 7. 18, 19. Land, he ſaith, *The Lord ſhall hiſs for the Flie that is in the uttermoſt part of the River of* Egypt, *and for the Bee that is in the Land of* Aſſyria; *and they ſhall come, and ſhall reſt all of them in the deſolate Valleys.* So deſcribing a cruel and implacable Enemy which he would cauſe to invade them, he ſaith, *Behold,*
Jer. 8. 17. *I will ſend Serpents, Cockatrices among you, which will not be charmed, and they*
Jer. 16. 16. *ſhall bite you. Behold, I will ſend for many Fiſhers, and they ſhall fiſh them:*

and

and after that I will ſend for many Hunters, and they ſhall hunt them from every Mountain, and from every Hill, and out of the Holes of the Rocks. Behold, I will ſend and take all the Families of Jer. 25. 9. *the North, ſaith the Lord, and* Nebuchadnezzar *the King of* Babylon *my Servant, and will bring them againſt this Land, and againſt the Inhabitants thereof. O Aſſyrian, the Rod of mine Anger, and the Staff in their Hand is mine Indignation. I will ſend him againſt an Hypocritical Nation, and againſt the People of my Wrath will I give him a Charge to take the Spoil, and to take the Prey, and to tread them down like the Mire in the Streets. I have commanded my ſanctified Ones, I have alſo called my mighty Ones for mine Anger. The Voice of a Multitude in the Mountains, as of a great People; a tumultuous Noiſe of the Kingdoms of Nations gathered together: the Lord of Hoſts muſtereth the Hoſt of the Battel.* This is to be underſtood of the *Medes* whom God would imploy for the Deſtruction of *Babylon* under the Conduct of *Cyrus*, as is afterwards more plainly expreſſed, *ver.* 17. where God ſaith, *Behold, I will ſtir up the* Medes *againſt them, which ſhall not re-*

Iſa. 10. 5, 6.

Iſa. 13. 3, 4.

gard Silver; and as for Gold, they ſhall not delight in it. Thus we ſee that God is ſaid to ſtir up Adverſaries, to hiſs for Enemies, to ſend and imploy them againſt a ſinful People that is to be puniſhed, to call them the Rod of his Anger, to ſtile them his ſanctified Ones. Such Inſtruments as he hath made choice of, and ſet a-part for the Service of being Executioners of his Wrath, he calls them his Servants, he is ſaid to command them, and to give them a Charge to perform the Work which he ſets them about; he is ſaid to lift up an Enſign for them, and to muſter their Armies. By all which Expreſſions 'tis evident that 'tis not only by his Permiſſion, but by his Order and Appointment, that one Nation takes up Arms againſt, and invades another. But here however we muſt take heed that we make not God the Author or Abettor of the Sins of Men. He neither infuſeth any Malice or Wickedneſs into their Hearts, nor ſtirs them up by any ſinful Motives to act as they do. As his Ends and Deſigns are moſt juſt and holy, ſo are all the Means and Expedients which he makes uſe of for compaſſing thoſe Ends. How and in what manner

manner his moſt wiſe, powerful, holy and righteous Providence influenceth and over-ruleth, directs and orders, moderates and governs the very worſt Actions of the very worſt Men, is one of thoſe deep things of God which are rather to be adored in Silence, than raſhly to be diſcourſed of and determined. Moſt ſure we are that God makes uſe of wicked Men, and ſerves himſelf of them even in thoſe things by which they moſt highly provoke him; and yet as ſure we are that he doth all this moſt righteouſly, he being *juſt in all his Ways, and holy in all his Works.* Pſal. 145. 17. In this therefore let us acquieſce and reſt ſatisfied; and inſtead of attempting to dive into thoſe profound Counſels of God, which while we are here we ſhall never be able fully and comprehenſively to underſtand our ſelves, much leſs to unfold and explain them to others; let us ſee what Uſe and Improvement may be made of what hath been ſpoken.

Uſe. Is it of God that one Nation makes War with, and invades another? Then let us acknowledg God, and take notice of his Hand in all Diſpenſations of this nature.

1. Are other Nations infeſted with War? Have they been haraſſed, laid deſolate, and even ruined by the Sword, while we in this Land have been at reſt, ſitting quietly under our own Vines and Fig-trees, and drinking the Waters of our own Ciſterns? Let us be ſenſible of the unſpeakable Goodneſs, Patience, and Long-ſufferance of God towards us in this merciful Diſpenſation. Surely it cannot be denied but that our Sins have been as great as the Sins of thoſe our Neighbours abroad, that have moſt ſuffered by the Sword. Yea rather, if the Aggravations of our Sins be well conſidered, it muſt be acknowledged that our Sins have not only equalled, but exceeded theirs. For our Mercies and Deliverances have not been common and ordinary, but ſignal and eminent; and theſe have not a little heightned our Provocations. What other Account therefore can be given of God's Forbearance towards us in a time when he hath ſhewed ſo much Severity againſt other Nations, but that *he is gracious to whom he will be gracious, and ſheweth Mercy to whom he will ſhew Mercy*, as he himſelf hath declared? Let us all be duly affected with this his admirable

Exod. 33. 19.

mirable Patience towards a moſt ſinful People, and give him the Glory of it.

2. Are we at preſent full of many juſt Fears that it may e're long be our Lot to drink of the ſame Cup that our Neighbours beyond the Sea have drank of? Do our own inteſtine Rents and Diviſions which were never more ſad than at preſent, and the bloody Machinations of thoſe many Enemies which we have within our own Bowels, threaten us at home? And do our Enemies abroad lie at the Catch to take the Advantages againſt us which our Diviſions give them, and to make the utmoſt Improvement of them? Do theſe things, together with the Thoughts of our crying Sins, affright us, and make us queſtion whether the Dregs of that Cup of trembling which hath been put into the Hands of others, may not be reſerved for us? Amidſt our Fears,

1*ſt*. Let us look up to God who thus ſhakes his Rod over the Land, and by ſound Repentance and Reformation, perſonal Reformation, let us make our Peace with him who ruleth over all the Kingdoms of the World, and hath the Hearts of all Men, even of Kings, in his Hand, and *turns them as the Rivers of* Prov. 21. 1.

Water, whither-ſoever he will. This is the beſt way to be ſecured againſt all Adverſaries ſo far as it ſhall be for God's Glory and our Good. *When a Man's*
Prov. 16. 7. *Ways pleaſe the Lord, he will make his Enemies to be at Peace with him.*

2dly. Having made our own Peace with God, let us be truly humbled for the Sins of the Land, and more eſpecially for thoſe Sins which moſt threaten us with the Invaſion of a foreign Enemy; ſuch as are, our Imitation of the Vices of other Nations, our Compliance with them, or our Approaches to them in any of their Superſtitions; our aping them, and conforming to them in their vain and phantaſtical Garbs and Faſhions. In reſpect of theſe things the Jews doted upon the *Babylonians*, and were fondly in love with them; for which Sins God threatned to *give*
Ezek. 16. *them up into their Hands*, as we may ſee. If we can be throughly humbled for our own Sins, and be reformed; and if we can be ſincerely humbled for, and heartily mourn over the Sins of the Land, we ſhall hereby take the moſt effectual Courſe for ſecuring our ſelves againſt whatſoever may be coming on the Nation. We read *Ezek.* 9. that God

God commanded a Mark to be ſet upon the Fore-heads of the Men that ſighed and cried for all the Abominations that were done in the midſt of *Jeruſalem*, that the Executioners of his Wrath might paſs them by, and ſpare them. And 'tis alſo the beſt Courſe that we can take for obtaining Mercy for the Land, and for averting thoſe Judgments which the Sins thereof cry aloud to Heaven for. By the Interceſſions of a few, thus humbling themſelves for their own Sins, and mourning for the Sins of others, the Wrath of God is ſometimes turned away from the Places where they live. But however, they are ſure to deliver their own Souls, though they cannot obtain Mercy for others, as we may gather from *Ezek.* 14. 14.

And this may ſuffice to have been ſpoken concerning the Lord's bringing upon *Manaſſeh* and his People the *Captains of the Hoſt of the King of* Aſſyria. What theſe Captains did, and with what Succeſs they managed their Buſineſs, is expreſs'd in the Words following; *They took* Manaſſeh *in the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to* Babylon. *They took* Manaſſeh

naſſeh *in the Thorns*; it was, as it ſeems, a Place of Thorns or Thickets, whither *Manaſſeh* in the Dread and Conſternation of Spirit under which he was, had fled to hide and ſhelter himſelf from the Enemy. So we read in 1 *Sam.* 13. 6. that the Iſraelites being greatly diſtreſſed by the Philiſtines that oppreſſed them, *did hide themſelves in Caves, and in Thickets, and in Rocks, and in high Places, and in Pits.* Now whereas *Manaſſeh*, though a King, was brought into that Diſtreſs, that he was conſtrained to hide himſelf in the Thorns from his Enemies, we may obſerve,

That great Men and Perſons of high Places, and great Dignity, may ſometimes be reduced to great Extremities, and be put to make uſe of hard Shifts to preſerve themſelves. *Siſera* the Captain General and Commander in chief of the Army of *Jabin* King of *Canaan*, was forced to light off his Chariot, and on his Feet to betake himſelf to the Houſe of *Heber* the *Kenite*, to ſave his Life, which yet he could not do, but loſt it there by the Hand of a Woman. *Zedekiah* King of *Judah*, and his Nobles, were conſtrained to dig through a Wall, to make way for their Flight in

Judg. 4. 15, 16, 17.

in the Night, that they might not fall into the Hands of the *Chaldees*; and yet was *Zedekiah* taken by them, and being bound with Fetters, ſaw his Sons ſlain before his Eyes; and then after that lamentable Spectacle, the laſt that ever he ſaw, had his Eyes put out. All Ages, and even our own times, have been full of the like Inſtances of the Mutability and Uncertainty of all earthly things. The Conſideration hereof may be uſeful to us ſeveral ways. Ezek. 12. Jer. 39.

1. Hence may ſuch as are in Places of Eminency above others, or enjoy more of the things of this World than others do, learn not to truſt in their Riches, Honour, Power, Greatneſs, or whatever elſe it is in which they excel others. All theſe things are fading and tranſitory, they are inconſtant and unſtable, they have their Turns and Revolutions; he that is full to Day, may be empty to Morrow; he that is now uppermoſt, may e're long be nethermoſt. How high ſoever any Man be, God can bring him low enough before he dies: *Although thou exalt thy ſelf as the Eagle; and though thou ſet thy Neſt among the Stars, yet thence will I bring thee down, ſaid the Lord to* Edom. Of this Obad. 4.

this ſad Change *Jeremiah* complains, and
Lam. 4. 5. laments over it; *They that did feed delicately, are deſolate in the Streets: they that were brought up in Scarlet, imbrace Dunghills.* A remarkable Inſtance we have of the Inſtability and Uncertainty of theſe temporal things, in *Beliſarius*, a great and famous Commander of the Forces of *Juſtinian* the Emperor. This renowned and victorious General, after that he had ſubdued the *Perſians*, overcome the *Goths*, and vanquiſhed the *Vandalls*; and by theſe his Victories raiſed himſelf ſo high as that he became the Object both of the Fear and Envy of Equals and Inferiours, was at length reduced to that Want and Miſery, that he was conſtrained to beg by the High-way-ſide, crying out to Travellers that paſſed by, *Date Obolum Beliſario*, give a Half-penny to *Beliſarius*. Let no Man therefore make Account that he ſtands ſo faſt and firm, but that his Feet may ſlip, and he may take a Fall; and the higher he is, the more dangerous will his Fall be. Neither is there any thing that threatens a Man more with a Fall than carnal Security, and a vain Confidence of the Firmneſs and Stability of his preſent Station, and the Unchangeableneſs

ableneſs of that proſperous Condition in which he is. When *David* ſaid, *In his Proſperity I ſhall never be moved; Lord, by thy Favour thou haſt made my Mountain to ſtand ſtrong: God did* but *hide his Face, and he was troubled. When Men ſhall ſay, Peace and Safety; then ſudden Deſtruction cometh upon them, as Travail upon a Woman with Child; and they ſhall not eſcape.* When Myſtical *Babylon* ſaith, *I ſit* as *a Queen, and am no Widow, and ſhall ſee no Sorrow: Then ſhall her Plagues come in one Day, Death, and Mourning, and Famine; and ſhe ſhall be utterly burnt with Fire: for ſtrong is the Lord God who judgeth her.* Pſal. 30. 6, 7. 1 Theſſ. 5. 3. Rev. 18. 7, 8.

2. Hence you may alſo learn, not to inſult over thoſe who having formerly been in a better Condition, are now brought low; their preſent Condition may be your own; you have no abſolute Security againſt being emptied from Veſſel to Veſſel, as they have been, or againſt being ſubjected to the ſame Changes which they have undergone. The Conſideration hereof ſhould beget in you Moderation towards Sufferers, and ſuch a compaſſionate Senſe of their Adverſities, as becomes them who remember that they themſelves are

Heb. 13. 3. are ſtill in the Body, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks.

3. Seeing the Higheſt may be brought low, and none are exempted from being obnoxious to Changes and Adverſities, it concerns all to prepare for Changes, and to be always in a readineſs to entertain them. And thoſe whoſe Condition hath elevated them above the common Sort, and ſet them on high, have ſo much the greater reaſon to be prepared for Changes, becauſe they are moſt in danger of them, they being more expoſed to Concuſſions and Shakings; as the tall Oaks and lofty Cedars are more expoſed to the Violence of Storms and Tempeſts, than the lower Shrubs are. Again, it concerns theſe above others to labour to be prepared for Changes, becauſe they are ſo apt to think themſelves to be above the reach of them: For this fond Conceit is attended with two great Miſchiefs.

(1.) Their fancying themſelves above the reach of Changes, expoſeth them to Changes ſo much the ſooner; for the evil Day is ſo much the nearer unto Men, by how much they put it farther off from themſelves.

(2.) When

(2.) When Changes come upon Men that had no expectation of them, and that made ſure account they were in no danger, they are ſurprized with them, and the Surprizal makes them the more grievous to them.

Queſt. But you will ſay, Though none, no not the higheſt, be exempted from being ſubject to Changes, yet may not ſomething be done towards the preventing of Changes, and ſecuring our ſelves againſt them?

Anſw. I anſwer, Though nothing that can be done, can abſolutely ſecure the higheſt againſt Changes, yet there are ſome things that do very much conduce towards Mens Safety and Security; and they are theſe that follow.

1. Humility. To have a low and humble Heart in a high Condition, is both a great Ornament, and a great Security to a Man. *Solomon* ſaith, *A Man's Pride ſhall bring him low; but Honour ſhall uphold the humble in Spirit.* Prov. 29. 23. And St. *James* ſaith out of *Solomon* alſo, though with ſome little Alteration, *God reſiſteth the Proud, but giveth Grace unto the Humble.* Jam. 4. 6. *Pride goeth before Deſtruction, and an haughty Spirit before a Fall.* Prov. 16. 18. And again, *Before Deſtruction the*

Prov. 18. 12. *the Heart of Man is haughty, and before Honour is Humility.* I ſhall add but one Place more, which ſhall be *Job* 40. 10, 11, 12. where God himſelf ſpeaking to *Job*, and ſetting before him for his Humiliation, God's incomparable Greatneſs and tranſcendent Excellencies, manifeſted in the Effects of his Power, Wiſdom and Goodneſs, ſaith, *Deck thy ſelf now with Majeſty and Excellency, and array thy ſelf with Glory and Beauty; caſt abroad the Rage of thy Wrath, and behold every one that is proud, and abaſe him: Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low.* In which Words God tells *Job* what he is wont to do, and bids him do the like if he be able; thereby to convince him of the infinite Diſtance between God and him. But that which is to my preſent Purpoſe, is, that God here makes his caſting abroad the Rage of his Wrath, and his beholding every one that is proud that he may abaſe him, and his looking upon every one that is proud that he may bring him low, an Inſtance of the great Works of God's moſt wiſe, powerful and righteous Providence. So then this is the conſtant Courſe of his Providence to behold and abaſe whoever is proud; and

and he is ſaid *to caſt abroad the Rage of his Fury* when he doth it, to note the high Indignation that he hath againſt that Sin, which therefore is ſaid to be *an Abomination to him. Theſe ſix things doth the Lord hate; yea ſeven are an Abomination to him: A proud Look, a lying Tongue, and Hands that ſhed innocent Blood*, &c. So then a proud Look is in *Solomon*'s Catalogue the firſt of thoſe Sins that are an Abomination to the Lord. By theſe Scriptures it is apparent, that the Sin of Pride is moſt hateful and abominable in the ſight of God; that he caſts his Eyes about, and beholds every one that is proud, that he may abaſe him and bring him low; that he reſiſteth the Proud, and ſets himſelf againſt him, but ſupports and upholds the humble in Spirit. Wherefore, I ſay, if ſuch as are high would prevent a Fall, they muſt be humble. Prov. 6. 16, 17.

2. They muſt acknowledg the free Bounty and Goodneſs of God in what they are or have above others, and give him the Glory of it. They muſt not think that they ſhine in a higher Orb, and have more of the World than others have, becauſe they are better, and have deſerved more at the Hands of God

than others, but reckon that they owe all to the pure and undeserved Mercy of God, which alone hath distinguished them from him that is clothed with Rags, and begs his Bread from Door to Door. Thus *Jacob* professed himself unworthy of all that God had done for him, and conferred on him: *I am not* Gen. 32. 10 *worthy of the least of all the Mercy, and of all the Truth which thou hast shewed unto thy Servant.* And so *David*, in an humble sense of his utter Unworthiness of what God had done for him, cries 1 Chron. 17. 16. out, *Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my House that thou hast brought me hitherto?* Your acknowledging God in what you are and have, and your giving him the Glory of it, is one good Mean for obtaining the continuance of what you enjoy; for God delights to do good to them that humbly and thankfully acknowledg his Goodness. But when you take no notice of God in what you enjoy, when you give him not your humble and thankful Acknowledgments thereof, and ascribe all to his his free Mercy, then are you in the ready way to be deprived of whatever you have received at his Hands. Thus when God's People *did not know*, that is, did not

not thankfully acknowledg that God *gave them Corn and Wine and Oil, and multiplied their Silver and Gold,* then he threatned to *take away his Corn in the time thereof, and to recover from them his Wool and his Flax, which he had given them to cover their Nakedneſs.* Hoſ. 2. 8, 9. Our humble and thankful Acknowledgment of God in what we have, is the Tribute and Homage, the high Rent, as it were, which he expecteth from us; and when this is not duly paid him, we forfeit all into his Hands.

3. If ſuch as are in Place of Eminency above their Brethren, and are intruſted with a larger Portion of the good things of this World than others have, would prevent a Fall, and obtain at the Hands of God the continuance of theſe his Mercies to them, they muſt make a good uſe of what they excel others in, and of what they are intruſted with above their Brethren. Hath God placed them in a higher Sphere above their Brethren? Hath he made them the Head, and not the Tail? Let them uſe their Power, not to cruſh and oppreſs their Inferiours, but to ſtrengthen, ſupport and uphold them. Hath God richly furniſhed them with a plentiful Por-

tion of outward Things? Let them make a ſober and temperate uſe of them themſelves, and be helpful to others out of that Abundance which God hath bleſſed them with. This is the way to ſecure to themſelves what through the Bounty and Goodneſs of God they are at preſent poſſeſſed of. *The liberal Man*
Iſa. 32. 8. *deviſeth liberal things, and by liberal things he ſhall ſtand.* This is one ſpecial Duty properly belonging to thoſe whoſe Cup God hath made to overflow.
1 Tim. 6. 17, 18, 19. *Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor truſt in uncertain Riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good VVorks, ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate, laying up in Store for themſelves a good Foundation againſt the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal Life.* But when Perſons of higher Place ſhall make uſe of their Power to the wronging and trampling under their feet ſuch as have no power to reſiſt them; and when they ſhall abuſe their Abundance to Drunkenneſs, Gluttony and Exceſs, and to the accommodating and furniſhing themſelves with what may ſupply and feed their Pride

and

and Vanity, they take the ready Courſe to be deſpoiled and ſtripp'd of all thoſe Bleſſings which they ſo horribly diſhonour God by, making them the Inſtruments of their Sin, and turning them into Fewel for their Luſts.

And ſo I have done with that Obſervation.

In the next place; Whereas *Manaſſeh*'s hiding himſelf in the Thorns did him no ſervice, ſtood him in no ſtead at all; whereas even in the Thorns, where it was not likely that a Prince ſhould have hid himſelf, he was found out, ſeized on, bound with Fetters, and thence carried to *Babylon*; we may obſerve,

That when God will puniſh Men for their Sins, no Means which they can make uſe of, ſhall ſecure them from his Judgments.

This is a Truth that no Man can queſtion who believes and acknowledgeth the Infinite Power and Wiſdom of God, and the Abſolute Dominion and Soveraignty that he hath over all his Creatures.

1. He being Infinite in Power, can do whatſoever he pleaſeth. *If he will*

Isa.43.13. *work, who can let him?* as he himſelf
Isa.46.10. ſpeaks. *My Counſel ſhall ſtand,* ſaith he, *and I will do all my Pleaſure.*

2. He being Infinite in Wiſdom as well as in Power, knows how to contrive and order, to diſpoſe of and direct, over-rule and govern all the Means conducing to their Puniſhment, ſo as all the Wiſdom of Men and Angels ſhall not be able to deviſe or contrive any thing that may counterwork his Counſels, or hinder the Accompliſhment of his Deſigns.

3. He moreover having an Abſolute Dominion and Soveraignty over all Creatures, and they being all at his Command, he can either imploy them as he pleaſeth for puniſhing ſuch as he will puniſh, or forbid them to be helpful to them, and reſtrain them from doing any thing whereby they may be reſcued from Puniſhment. Wherefore,

(1.) When God will puniſh Men, when he will have them ſuffer for their Sins, he will ſometimes diſenable them to make uſe of any Means whereby they may help themſelves. When they ſhould run away from Danger, they have no Power to do it, but ſtand ſtill as Men confounded and aſtoniſhed, till their

their Fears overtake them, and come upon them: when they ſhould act to ſecure themſelves againſt the Evils which threaten them, they cannot *find their Hands*, as the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks. Pſal. 76. 5. When they ſhould be caſting about and contriving what may be for their Safety and Security, they are at their Wits End, and cannot make uſe of their Reaſon to relieve themſelves in their Diſtreſſes: *Their Wiſdom faileth them*, as Eccl. 10. 3. *Solomon* ſpeaks.

(2.) Sometimes again when they contrive and conſult for their Safety, God blaſteth their Counſels, and turns them into Fooliſhneſs; when they make uſe of Means, God makes the very Means which they made uſe of for their Preſervation, an occaſion of their Ruine: As *Siſera* betaking himſelf to the Houſe of *Heber* the *Kenite*, to ſave his Life, Judg. 4. loſt it, and met with that Deſtruction 15, 16, 17. there, which by running thither he ſought to avoid; while he flies from the Sword, he meets with a Nail that pierced through his Temples. If they eſcape one Judgment, they are overtaken by another. Thus *Sennacherib* having eſcaped the Peril of the Sword 2 Chron. abroad, is ſlain at home in the Houſe of 32. 21.

Niſroch his God, by thoſe that came out of his own Bowels. Thus God threatning wicked Men, ſaith, it ſhall
Amos 5.19 be with them, *as if a Man did flee from a Lion, and a Bear met him; or went into the Houſe, and laid his Hand on the Wall, and a Serpent bit him.* Much to the ſame Effect God threatning *Moab*,
Jer. 48. 43, 44. ſaith, *Fear, and the Pit, and the Snare ſhall be unto thee. He that fleeth from the Fear, ſhall fall into the Pit; and he that getteth out of the Pit, ſhall be taken in the Snare.* When once a Man hath by his Sins made himſelf obnoxious to the Juſtice of God, whither can he flee from his revenging Hand? Whitherſoever he goes, he is ſure to meet with an incenſed God: Whitherſoever he withdraws himſelf, he cannot run away from him who is omnipreſent. *Can any hide himſelf in ſecret Places, ſaith the Lord? Do not I fill Heaven and Earth, ſaith the Lord?* Jer. 23.24. *Whither ſhall I go from thy Spirit? and whither ſhall I*
Pſal. 139. 7, 8, 9, 10. *flee from thy Preſence?* ſaith the Pſalmiſt: *If I aſcend up into Heaven, thou art there: if I make my Bed in Hell, behold thou art there: If I take the Wings of the Morning, and dwell in the uttermoſt Parts of the Sea; even there ſhall thy*

thy Hand lead me, and thy right Hand ſhall hold me. If a Man be your Enemy, and ſeeks to do you a Miſchief, you may poſſibly get you away from him, and retire you to ſome Place or other, where he ſhall not be able to find you, or where he may not reach you. Though Kings have long Arms, as we ſay, and can by themſelves and by their Miniſters and Inſtruments reach a great way, yet they cannot reach ſo far, but that ſometimes ſuch as have offended them make ſhift to get them out of their reach. But if a Man ſhall have offended God, if he ſhall by his Provocations have made God his Enemy, whither can he betake himſelf where he may be without the reach of his Juſtice? Surely he muſt go out of the World that would go away from God: And if he ſhould ſo do, yet would he meet with God in the other World, and even there would he fall under his Sin-revenging Juſtice. Hence it is that God often ſpeaks of himſelf, as of one that hath ſuch a powerful Arm, and ſuch irreſiſtible Might, that no created Power can reſcue any out of his Hand, when he hath determined to make them Inſtances of his Juſtice,

Juſtice, and of his fierce Indignation againſt Sin, by inflicting exemplary Puniſhments on them. Having threatned, ſeverely threatned to reckon with the wicked, the obſtinate and impenitent Sinner, that in the height of his carnal Security, thinks God to be altogether ſuch an one as himſelf; he at length concludes, *Conſider this, ye that forget God, leſt he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you*, Pſal. 50. 22. *Ye are my Witneſſes, ſaith the Lord, that I am God. Yea, before the Day was, I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my Hand*, Iſa. 43. 12, 13. *See now, that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my Hand. For I lift up my Hand to Heaven, and ſay, I live for ever. If I whet my Sword, and my Hand take hold on Judgment, I will render Vengeance to mine Enemies, and reward them that hate me. I will make mine Arrows drunk with Blood, and my Sword ſhall devour Fleſh*, Deut. 32. 39, 40, 41, 42. Thus I have ſhewed that when God will puniſh Men for their Sins, no Means they can make uſe of, ſhall ſecure them againſt his Judgments. Neither their high Quality in the World,

World, nor the Eminency of their Rank and Condition, nor their Honours, nor their Power, nor their Policy, nor their Riches, nor their Intereſts, nor their Friends, nor any thing elſe that can be named, ſhall do them any Good, or ſtand them in any ſtead, to interpoſe between them and the Wrath of God, and skreen off his Judgments from them. I come now to apply this Point briefly.

Uſe 1. Let no Man therefore, let no impenitent Sinner be incouraged to go on in his evil Ways by the vain Hopes of going unpuniſhed, and of eſcaping the Judgments of God. A Man that ſhall thus flatter himſelf, that makes account he ſhall be able to find Means to eſcape the Judgments of God whoever be puniſhed; ſuch an one above all others ſhall be ſure to be puniſhed moſt ſeverely. Conſider how dreadfully God hath threatned ſuch hardned, ſecure, and fearleſs Sinners: *He that bleſſeth himſelf in his Heart, ſaying, I ſhall have Peace, though I walk in the Imagination of my Heart, to add Drunkenneſs to Thirſt: The Lord will not ſpare him, but the Anger of the Lord, and* Deut. 29. 19, 20.

and his Jealouſy ſhall ſmoke againſt that Man; and all the Curſes that are written in the Law ſhall lie upon him: and the Lord ſhall blot out his Name from under Heaven. Such ſecure Sinners were thoſe whom God threatned: *It ſhall come to paſs that I will ſearch* Jeruſalem *with Candles, and will puniſh them that are ſettled on their Lees, and that ſay in their Hearts, The Lord will not do Good, neither will he do Evil.* As if they had ſaid, The Lord is in Heaven, and regards not what is done by us here below; he will neither reward us if we do well, nor puniſh us if we do ill. Such obdurate and ſecure Sinners as theſe, God would find out whereſoever they ſhould be; he would ſearch *Jeruſalem* with Candles for them, that he might puniſh them. Not one of them that upon the narroweſt Search could be found out, ſhould eſcape his righteous Judgments. So again, God threatned that ſuch as did *put far away the evil Day,* did make account that the Day of Viſitation, when God would reckon with them for their Sins, would never come, or that it would be long enough before it would come; and that thereupon *cauſed the Seat of Violence to come near;*

Zeph. 1. 12

Amos 6. 3, 4, 5, 7.

gave

gave themſelves to Rapine, Oppreſſion and Injuſtice; and moreover glutted themſelves with ſinful Pleaſures and Delights, addicting themſelves to all manner of Riot and Exceſs; I ſay, God threatned theſe ſecure Sinners, that they *ſhould go captive with the firſt that ſhould go captive.* So then, none are more ſure to be puniſhed, and to be puniſhed ſeverely and ſpeedily, than they who leaſt fear it, and who are moſt confident of their Safety and Security.

Uſe 2. Let all impenitent Sinners therefore be perſwaded and exhorted to labour to make their Peace with God, and to do it ſpeedily, leſt the Judgments of God overtake them, and come upon them, before they have done it. Let them not be ſlack herein, and put it off from Day to Day, as if there were no Danger in delaying it. They may, perhaps, think there is very little in thoſe Threatnings and Denunciations of Judgments which they often hear; and that ſuch an evil Day as they have been frighted with, ſhall never come; or if it do come, that they ſhall be able to make a ſhift to ſecure themſelves well enough: They have ſuch and ſuch Ad-

Advantages above other Men; and therefore whoever ſuffer, they hope they may find Means to be exempted from ſuffering. But let none deceive themſelves; theſe are but idle Dreams and vain Fancies. When God comes to viſit Mens Sins upon them, he comes irreſiſtibly. All the Means in the World for keeping off God's Judgments, all their Advantages for ſecuring themſelves will ſignify nothing. Whatever they may ſeem to have to ſafe-guard and protect themſelves againſt the Wrath of God, their Sins have made them naked, as *Moſes* ſaid of the *Iſraelites*. They lie as open, and as much expoſed to the Judgments of God, as if they were perfectly ſtripp'd of whatever might promiſe them any Protection or Security in an evil Day. 'Tis true, Mens Riches, and Power, and Policy, and Intereſts, may help them to withſtand many a Shock, and to weather out many a Storm: But when the Day comes which God hath ſet, and appointed for reckoning with them, then all theſe things in which they truſt, ſhall afford them no Relief at all. It may be inſtead of relieving and protecting them, they may contribute to their

Exod. 32. 25.

their Ruine. So we know God often curseth Mens Policies, and causeth the Wise to be taken *in their own Craftiness*, as *Eliphaz* speaks: And their Riches do them no other Service than only to make them a more desirable Prey to the Enemy. When the time comes that they are to be punished, in vain shall they hope to escape, whatever they have to protect and defend themselves withal, and to ward off those Evils that are coming upon them. The Prophet *Jeremiah* fore-telling, and prophetically describing the Overthrow of *Pharaoh*'s Army, and all his hired Forces, by the Army of *Nebuchadnezzar*, and the sore Distress of *Egypt* attending that Overthrow, saith, *Her hired Men in the midst of her, are like fatted Bullocks; for they are turned back, and are fled away together: they did not stand, because the Day of their Calamity was come upon them, and the time of their Visitation.* When the time of Mens Calamity, and the Day of Mens Visitation is come, nothing shall help them or deliver them out of the Hands of God. This Insignificancy and Unavailableness of all Means for affording of Relief, God emphatically sets forth, when speaking

Job 5.13.

Jer. 46.21.

to

Ver. 11. to *Egypt*, he ſaith, *Go up to* Gilead, *and take Balm, O Virgin, the Daughter of* Egypt; *in vain ſhalt thou uſe many Medicines, for thou ſhalt not be healed.* I ſay therefore, make your Peace with God, and do it ſpeedily before it be too late. *Seek the Lord while he may be found;*
Iſa. 55. 6. *call upon him while he is near*; as the Prophet exhorts. Seek him for the Pardon of your Sins; ſeek him for the averting of thoſe Judgments, which by your Sins you have deſerved, and which are hanging over your Heads. To the ſame Effect is that Exhortation of the
Zeph. 2. 1, 2, 3. Prophet *Zephaniah*; *Gather your ſelves together*; *yea, gather together, O Nation not deſired: before the Decree bring forth, before the Day paſs as the Chaff*; *before the fierce Anger of the Lord come upon you, before the Day of the Lord's Anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord all ye meek of the Earth, which have wrought his Judgments, ſeek Righteouſneſs, ſeek Meekneſs: it may be ye ſhall be hid in the Day of the Lord's Anger.* If you be ſo hardy and obſtinate as to reſolve to go on in your Sins, whatever comes of it, then know that you will find in the
Heb. 10. 31 End, that *'tis a fearful thing to fall into the Hands of the living God*, as the

Apo-

Apoſtle ſpeaks. And fall into his Hands you will, if you ſtill go on to provoke him: Though he may have born long with you, though he may have exerciſed great Patience towards you, yet there will be an end of his Patience.

The Seventh Sermon.

2 Chron. 33. 10, 11, 12, 13.

And the Lord ſpake to Manaſſeh *and his People: but they would not hearken,* &c.

HItherto of the Courſe which God took with *Manaſſeh* in order to his reclaiming, when gentler Means would do him no good; which was the third Particular in the Text.

Now followeth the fourth Particular, namely, the Effect which this ſeverer Courſe had upon *Manaſſeh*; *When he was in Affliction, he beſought the Lord his God, and humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.*

When he was in Affliction. A ſore and heavy Affliction it was for a King to fall into the Hands of his Enemies that thirſted after his Blood, to be bound with Fetters, to be carried away captive into a ſtrange Land, to be there a Priſoner ſtanding in fear of his Life every day and every hour: This was ſuch an Affliction as could not but deeply affect him, and go near his Heart. Now queſtionleſs he bitterly recounts and calls to mind what he enjoyed at home in his own Land, where he ſat upon the Throne and ſwayed the Scepter, and how lamentable a Change of his Condition he had lived to ſee. At length he looks beyond his Enemies, and takes notice of the Hand of God in all that had come upon him; and this brings to his Mind thoſe his grievous Sins and horrid Crimes, by which in the time of his Proſperity he had provoked God to give him up into the Hands of his Enemies, and to bring upon him all that Miſery under which he now ſmarted. Now he calls to mind how often God had by his Servants the Prophets called him to Repentance; how often he had been forewarned of all the Miſery that he would bring upon himſelf, if he did not

not by timely Repentance prevent it. Now he ſadly remembers how wretchedly he had ſtopped his Ears, and hardned his Heart againſt good Counſels and Admonitions: And this at length ſets him a praying, and humbling himſelf before God, which till this time he could never be perſwaded to do. When God was pleaſed to correct and chaſten him in this ſevere and extraordinary manner, then, and not till then, he began to think of returning unto God, from whom he had revolted. *When he was in Affliction, he beſought the Lord his God.*

Hence we may obſerve,

That Afflictions will work upon Men, and prevail with them to return to God from whom they have gone aſtray, when all other Means are ineffectual.

For the right underſtanding of this Point, we muſt know that Afflictions of themſelves cannot effect this gracious Change in any Man. 'Tis not ſo much from any natural Property or inherent Virtue in Afflictions that they thus work, as it is from God who ſanctifieth Afflictions, and makes them Means of ſpiritual Good to as many as he is plea-

ſed to work upon by them. If God be not pleaſed to ſanctify Afflictions, and to accompany them with the effectual Operation of his Spirit upon the Hearts of Men, they are never the better for them, it may be they are much the worſe; inſtead of being reduced from the Error of their Ways, and of being reclaimed and brought home to God, they are driven farther away from him.

2 Chron. 28. 22. So we read concerning *Ahaz*, that *in the time of his Diſtreſs he treſpaſſed yet more againſt the Lord.* Thus *Saul*, when in his Diſtreſs he ſhould have had recourſe

1 Sam 28. 7, 8. unto God for Relief, betook himſelf to the Devil, and conſulted with the Witch of *Endor*. The like did *Ahaziah*, who

2 King. 1. 2 in his Sickneſs, as if there had been no God in *Iſrael*, ſent unto *Baalzebub* the God of *Ekron*, to enquire whether he ſhould recover. Thus though the Judgments of God that had been inflicted on the Votaries and Adherents of An-

Rev. 16. 10, 11. tichriſt, were ſo terrible, that they gnawed their Tongues for Pain, yet they blaſphemed the God of Heaven becauſe of their Pains and their Sores, and repented not of their Deeds. And this is that which is confirmed by every Day's Experience: We ſee many wicked

wicked Men that are emptied from Veſſel to Veſſel, and haraſſed with all ſorts of Afflictions; and yet they are as bad as ever they were; yea perhaps the more they are afflicted, the more are their Hearts eſtranged from God, and the more are they hardned in their Sins. How little Good is done upon wicked Men by Afflictions unleſs they be ſanctified to them, *Solomon* informeth us, ſaying, *Though thou ſhouldſt bray a Fool in a Mortar among Wheat with a Peſtle, yet will not his Fooliſhneſs depart from him.* *Solomon*'s Fool is a wicked Man, whoſe Fooliſhneſs is his Wickedneſs: This his Wickedneſs will not depart from him, though you bray him with a Peſtle in a Mortar; though you beat him, and bruiſe him, and even pound him to pieces, yet will he ſtill be the ſame, every way as bad and as wicked as he was when you firſt took him in hand. Afflictions may batter him, bruiſe him, and break him; but without God's ſanctifying Grace concurring and cooperating with them, they will never change a Man's Nature, or purge away his Corruption. Prov. 27. 22.

And here by the way, we may learn two things from hence.

1. In all our Afflictions to look up to God, and beg of him that he would vouchſafe to ſanctify them to us, without which we cannot expect to receive any Good by them. They may do us Hurt, but they can do us no Good; they may make us worſe, but they cannot make us better without his Bleſſing. 'Tis eaſy to obſerve what ſad Work Afflictions, through the Corruption of Man's Nature, make, when they light upon wicked Men, and are not ſanctified to them; how they repine, and fret, and murmur; how in the height of their Impatience they toſs themſelves like *a wild Bull in a Net*, as the Prophet expreſſeth it; how they oft-times blaſpheme God, and fall foul upon Men who have been in God's Hand the Inſtruments of their Sufferings. Whoſo conſiders this, cannot but think himſelf highly concerned to be an earneſt Suitor unto God, that his Afflictions may be ſo ſanctified to him, as that he may be enabled to make a holy Uſe and Improvement of them, and not be tranſported by them into thoſe ſinful Exceſſes, into which the Corruption of our Nature would hurry us.

2. We

2. We may alſo learn humbly and thankfully to acknowledg the Goodneſs of God to us; if we have received any Benefit by our Afflictions, to bleſs God for it, and to give him the Glory of it. Have our Afflictions brought us to the ſight of our Sins? Have they humbled us? Have they reduced us from the Errour of our Ways, and led us home to God? Let us not think theſe things to be the natural Iſſues and Fruits of Affliction. No ſuch matter: 'tis God, and he alone that puts Efficacy into Afflictions for the production of theſe great and excellent things. Wherefore let us aſcribe them not to the Means, but to God, and accordingly bleſs him for them.

But to return to the Point to be inſiſted on. Afflictions will work upon Men, and prevail with them to return to God from whom they have gone aſtray, when all other Means are ineffectual. Afflictions, if God be pleaſed to ſanctify them, will do Men good when no other Means will. This Truth may be confirmed both from Scripture and Experience.

(1.) From Scripture it may be confirmed. *David*, when he was out of

the way, wanted not other Means to reduce him, and to ſet him right again; but yet he acknowledgeth that Afflictions were the Means by which he was recalled from his Wandrings: *Before I was afflicted I went aſtray, but now I have kept thy Word.* And again, *It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn thy Statutes.* But next to the great Inſtance of the Efficacy of Afflictions this way in *Manaſſeh*, there is none other ſo full and pertinent, as that of the Prodigal Son. This wild young Man could not be reſtrained, and kept in good Order by his Father's Inſtructions and Counſels. His Father's Diſcipline was too ſevere for him; his Father's Houſe was little better than a Priſon to him, a ſtrait Confinement not to be endured, and ſuch an Abridgment of his Liberty as was intolerable: Abroad he muſt, and take his Portion along with him alſo. Having withdrawn himſelf from under his Father's Government, and being at liberty, he prodigally and riotouſly ſpends all that he had, and reduceth himſelf to extreme Want and Miſery. At length when he was ready to periſh, and knew not what to do, he conſiders how much better it was with him

Pſal. 119. 67.

Ver. 71.

Luke 15. 11, 12, &c.

him while he was at home with his Father, and takes up Reſolutions of returning to him, and of humbling himſelf before him. Here we ſee Affliction and Miſery works upon this Prodigal, and brings him home to his Father's Houſe, when nothing elſe would reclaim him. And all this, what is it elſe but a lively Emblem of the Condition of a Sinner that is gone aſtray from God, and is reduced by Affliction, when nothing elſe will reclaim him?

(2.) This Truth may alſo be confirmed from Experience. We may obſerve, and 'tis no difficult matter to obſerve it, that when Men could not be reclaimed and taken off from their vicious Courſes by any other Means, Afflictions have done it. Sometimes the Senſe of God's Wrath, and Terrors of Conſcience; ſometimes a ſevere Fit of Sickneſs that hath brought them near the Grave, or ſome other ſharp Affliction, hath imbittered that Sin to them, and taken off their Hearts from it, which before they could never be perſwaded to part with. And there is no Man that hath any good Acquaintance with himſelf, and with his own Heart, and hath made any obſervation of God's Dealings

Dealings with his Soul, but must have taken notice that Afflictions have been of that use to him, and have done him that Good in making a Separation between him and his Sins, which nothing else could ever do, neither the Word, nor all the Threatnings against Sin therein contained, nor the good Counsels and Admonitions of Friends, nor the Examples of the Judgments of God inflicted on others for the same Sins. When none of all these things will make a Man willing to leave his Sins, a Man's own proper Smart and personal Afflictions will do it.

Now if you ask, how God is pleased to make Afflictions the Means of reclaiming Sinners, and of bringing them home to himself when other Means will not do it?

I answer; Afflictions, when God is pleased to sanctify them, do many ways contribute towards the reclaiming of Sinners.

1. They make Men serious; they call in Mens Minds from the things of the World, from the Honours, the Profits, the Pleasures, the Divertisements and Vanities thereof, and make them reflect and consider how 'tis with them as

as to their ſpiritual Eſtate, and in what Condition their Souls are, and how Matters ſtand between God and them. Theſe things are little minded while Men are in Proſperity, and they have no Changes; Men have other things to entertain themſelves with, and to take up their Time and their Thoughts; they have things which they are better pleaſed with, and which they take more Content in. But in time of Affliction they retire into themſelves, and are more converſant at home. The time of Adverſity is a time of thinking, and of Conſideration; *In the Day of Adverſity conſider*, ſaith *Solomon*. Conſideration is the proper Duty of that Time, and then a Man is fitteſt for it. Now Conſideration, and ſerious Reflection on our ſelves, are the firſt Step towards our returning to God, and into the way of Obedience, when we have gone aſtray. *David* thought on his Ways, and then turned his Feet unto God's Teſtimonies. And 'tis ſaid of the Prodigal when he was in Diſtreſs, that he came to himſelf, and ſaid, *How many hired Servants of my Father's have Bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh for Hunger?* He came to himſelf; before he

Eccl. 7. 14.

Pſal. 119. 59.

Luke 15. 17.

was

was beſide himſelf, he was abroad before: while his Portion and his Money laſted, he had other things to mind; but when all was ſpent, and when by his profuſe, prodigal and luxurious Courſes he had brought himſelf to thoſe Extremities that he was ready to be famiſhed, then he began to reflect upon himſelf, and to conſider how fooliſhly he had done in forſaking his Father's Houſe; what Miſery he had thereby brought himſelf into; and how much happier he might have been if he had ſtill kept at home with his Father, and never thought of rambling away from him. Theſe and the like ſerious Reflections and Conſiderations at length produce the Reſolutions which he takes up, ſaying with himſelf, *I will ariſe and go to my Father, and will ſay unto him, Father, I have ſinned againſt Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son; make me as one of thy hired Servants.* And ſo much concerning the firſt thing that Affliction doth towards the reclaiming of Sinners; it makes Men ſerious, it calls in their Minds from the World and the things thereof, and makes them reflect upon themſelves and conſider.

2. Affli-

2. Afflictions bring Men to the Sight of their Sins, which is a further Step towards their reclaiming. The Affliction which God lays upon a Man is oft-times such as to its Kind, Nature and Circumstances, that it evidently points at a Man's Sin, and plainly shews the Sinner what the Sin is which God corrects him for. To make Men see and discern their Sins, and the better to convince them of their Sins, God often as it were writes the Sin upon the Punishment, and that in such fair and legible Characters as that all may read it, especially the Sinner himself, who is best acquainted with his own Sin, and so can best discern how exactly God sutes the Punishment thereunto. A most famous and remarkable Instance hereof we have in *Adonibezek*; who having cut off the Thumbs and great Toes of threescore and ten Kings, had at length his own Thumbs and great Toes cut off, which made him acknowledg the righteous Judgment of God herein, saying, *As I have done, so God hath requited me.* But though Afflictions be not such as evidently point at the Sin, and presently make Men see it, and acknowledg it, whether they will or no; Judg. 1. 6, 7.

yet

yet do they conduce to the bringing of us to the Sight of our Sins divers ways.

1*ſt.* Afflictions make Men ſenſible of God's Diſpleaſure: When they are afflicted, they apprehend God to be angry with them, though perhaps they cannot ſee what it is by which they have provoked him: They ſay within themſelves, Surely God is much diſpleaſed with us, or elſe ſuch or ſuch an Affliction had never befallen us.

2*dly.* This makes them ſearch and inquire after the Cauſe of their Afflictions, the Sins by which God hath been ſo much provoked to Diſpleaſure againſt them. This is a Work that Men take little Content in; 'tis a Work which they are moſt averſe from. Men care not how little and how ſeldom they look into themſelves; they had much rather be abroad than at home. But however Afflictions put them upon this unacceptable Work. Search after their Sins they will, rather than ſtill ſmart under the Hand of God that afflicts them.

3*dly.* Afflictions make Men willing to find out their Sins, and they make them ſearch after their Sins as thoſe that have a Mind to find them. Men feeling

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ing the Smart of the Rod, and earneſtly deſiring to be freed from it, and to be at Eaſe, will ſearch after their Sins narrowly and diligently, they will *ſearch after them with all their Hearts*, as the Prophet ſpeaks in another Caſe; they will ſearch after them with an earneſt Deſire to find them, and never be at reſt till they do find them, becauſe they know till then they may not hope to be freed from their Afflictions.

4*thly*. Afflictions do alſo open Mens Eyes to ſee that which before they could not or would not ſee. Men are not willing to ſee their Sins; they willingly overlook them, or cloſe their Eyes that they may not ſee them: But Afflictions make them ſee and acknowledg thoſe their Errors and Miſcarriages which they would never be convinced of or acknowledg till the Hand of God was upon them. The Child that is corrected, will confeſs and acknowledg his Faults under the Rod, which he would never own or acknowledg before. When *David* commanded the People to be numbred, he ſaw not, or would not ſee the Evil of that Action, though *Joab* and the Captains of the Hoſt ſaw it, and utterly diſliked the thing: 2 Sam. 24. 4.

thing: And as for *Joab*, though he was none of the beſt Men otherwiſe, yet 'tis ſaid of him, that *the Word of the King was abominable to him.* But whatever *Joab* and the Captains of the Hoſt thought of this Action, *David* was reſolute, and would have it done, and his Word prevailed againſt *Joab*, and againſt the Captains of the Hoſt, as we read in the Place before-mentioned. Thus far *David* would not be convinced of the Sinfulneſs of his commanding the People to be numbred: But afterwards when his Heart had ſmitten him, and eſpecially after that ſeventy thouſand of his People had been ſwept away by the Peſtilence, then he ſaw his Miſcarriage, and cried out, *I have ſinned, and I have done wickedly; but theſe Sheep, what have they done? Let thy Hand be againſt me, and againſt my Father's Houſe.* Thus we have ſeen how Afflictions are Means of bringing Men to the Sight of their Sins, and how many ways they conduce thereunto.

1 Chron. 21. 6.

Ver. 10.

Ver. 17.

3. By Afflictions Men come to be acquainted with the Evil, the hainous Nature and Danger of Sin. Before the Sinner is afflicted, he makes light of Sin, he thinks there is no great Evil or Danger

Danger in those Sins which he indulgeth himself in. But when God severely corrects him for those things which he looked upon as small Matters, and very pardonable Offences, such venial Sins as he thinks, no Man need question but that they are pardoned in Course, and remitted as often and as easily as committed; I say, when God severely corrects him for those things, then he begins to have other Thoughts of them; then he understands that there is much more Evil and Malignity in them than he was aware of; then he begins to be sensible of the Danger of allowing himself in them. Thus by Afflictions God rectifies his Judgment, and corrects his Errors and Mistakes about the Nature and Danger of Sin.

The unclean Person as long as he escapes unpunished, is apt to think he may safely enough gratify his Lust by addicting himself to that abominable Sin: But when he feels that his Bones are full of the Sins of his Youth, when he hath brought upon himself those Infirmities and Diseases, those exquisite and tormenting Pains which are the natural Attendants and proper Fruits of that Sin; then he begins to understand

that there is much more Evil and Danger in that Sin than he was apprehensive of.

So the Drunkard is apt to think there is little Evil or Danger in that Excess which he often indulgeth himself in; but when he finds that he hath thereby ruined himself and his distressed Family, that he hath brought both himself, and such as depend on him, to a Morsel of Bread; and moreover, that he hath overthrown the State of his Body, impaired his Health, wasted his Strength, treasured up in his declining and half-rotten Carcase, Matter for all manner of Diseases, almost extinguished natural Heat, and even drowned Nature by the continual Droppings of his Excess; and by all this brought himself to the brink of the Pit; then at length he becomes sensible of the great Evil, and the woful Consequents of his intemperate Courses; then he cries out against himself, that he should ever be such a Beast as he hath been; that he should by his Excess ruine his Family, and destroy himself both Soul and Body. In short, Afflictions are a kind of spiritual Eye-salve whereby our Sight is cleared, and we are enabled to see what

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we ſaw not before we were afflicted; and to ſee thoſe things more clearly and diſtinctly, which before we ſaw darkly and confuſedly. Afflictions help us to ſee thoſe Sins in our ſelves which before we diſcerned not; or if we had ſome obſcure and imperfect Sight of them, if we had a dark and confuſed View of them before we were afflicted, our Afflictions help us to ſee them, and to diſcern the Evil and Danger of them more clearly.

4. Afflictions put us upon the great and neceſſary Duties of Humiliation and Prayer. Afflictions make us humble our ſelves for our Sins, by which we have brought our Afflictions upon us; and they make us earneſt Suitors to God in Prayer for the Pardon of our Sins, and for the Removal of thoſe our Afflictions which have been the bitter Fruit of our Sins. Afflictions have often taught Men to humble themſelves and pray, who were mere Strangers to thoſe Duties before, and never had any Acquaintance with them till God's afflicting Hand was upon them. Even the Mariners, a Generation of Men that for the moſt part do not much addict themſelves to Devotion, will pray, and call

upon God in a Tempeſt, as we may ſee, *Pſal.* 107. where both their Danger and their Carriage therein is thus de-
Pſal. 107. 25,26,27, 28. ſcribed; *He commandeth and raiſeth the ſtormy Winds, which lift up the Waves: they mount up to the Heavens, they go down again to the deep; their Soul is melted becauſe of Trouble; they reel to and fro, and ſtagger like a drunken Man, and are at their Wits end: Then they cry unto the Lord in their Trouble, and he bringeth them out of their Diſtreſſes.* So *Jonah* 1. 5. The Mariners being afraid, by reaſon of a mighty Tempeſt, *cried every Man unto his God.* So the Pro-
Iſa. 26. 16. phet ſaith of the Jews; *Lord, in Trouble have they viſited thee; they poured out a Prayer when thy Chaſtning was upon them.* And this is that which God aims at in afflicting his People; *I will*
Hoſ. 5. 15. *go and return to my Place,* that is, I will withdraw from them, ſaith he, *till they acknowledg their Offence, and ſeek my Face.* This here in my Text was the Effect which Affliction took upon *Manaſſeh*; *When he was in Affliction, he beſought the Lord his God, and humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.* This Courſe St. *James* directs the Afflicted unto: *Is*

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any among you afflicted? let him pray. Jam. 5. 13.
To the like Purpoſe is the Exhortation of St. *Peter* to ſuch as are caſt down under the afflicting Hand of God; *Humble your ſelves under the mighty Hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.* 1 Pet. 5. 6.

5. Afflictions make Men willing to forſake their Sins, and induce them to take up Reſolutions to forſake them, and caſt them off. The beloved Sins of Men are ſweet to them, and they are moſt unwilling to leave them as long as they can enjoy them without Trouble or Moleſtation, as long as they ſuffer nothing, and as they ſmart not upon the account of their Sins: But when they are chaſtned and afflicted for their Sins, this makes Sin bitter to them, and makes them reſolve to part with it, to caſt it off, and abandon it; this makes them bind and oblige themſelves by the moſt ſolemn and ſacred Bonds never to return to it any more. This is that which God's People were to do in the time of their Affliction; they muſt reſolve upon other Courſes, they muſt promiſe and vow to renounce and forſake thoſe Sins by which they had drawn down the Judgments of God upon them; they muſt return to the

Lord, and ſay unto him, Aſſher *ſhall not*
Hoſ. 14. 3. *ſave us; we will not ride upon Horſes, neither will we ſay any more to the Works of our hands, Ye are our Gods.* Theſe Reſolutions their Afflictions ſhould produce, and ſuch Reſolutions they would produce, when their Sufferings, being ſanctified to them, ſhould effectually reduce them, and bring them home to God. And the like Reſolutions did *David*'s Afflictions produce in him, as we may gather from the frequent mention there is of the Vows which he then made unto God: *Thy Vows are upon me, O God: I will render Praiſe unto thee*, Pſal. 56. 12. *Thou, O God, haſt heard my Vows*, Pſal. 61. 5. *Prepare Mercy and Truth which may preſerve me: So will I ſing Praiſe unto thee for ever, that I may daily perform my Vows*, ver. 7, 8. *I will pay thee my Vows which my Lips have uttered, and my Mouth hath ſpoken when I was in Trouble*, Pſal. 66. 13, 14. Now by theſe his Vows no doubt but he obliged himſelf to teſtify his Thankfulneſs unto God when he ſhould deliver him out of his Troubles, not only by offering Sacrifices, which were the uſual Teſtifications of Thankfulneſs in thoſe times, but alſo by a more careful En-

Endeavour to forſake all Sin, and to give up himſelf to God more intirely in a way of conſtant and univerſal Obedience, without which all their Sacrifices and Oblations had in God's Account ſignified little.

The Sum of all that hath been ſpoken, is this: Afflictions will work upon Men, and prevail with them to return to God from whom they have gone aſtray, when all other Means are ineffectual. That 'tis not from any natural Property or inherent Virtue in Afflictions themſelves that they produce this Effect, but from the Grace of God, and the Operation of his Spirit accompanying Afflictions, and ſanctifying them to us. That Afflictions, ſanctified Afflictions, contribute towards the reclaiming of Sinners. (1.) By making them more ſerious, and by cauſing them to reflect upon themſelves, and conſider. (2.) By bringing them to the ſight of their Sins, which they do ſeveral ways. (3.) By acquainting them with the great Evil and Hainouſneſs of Sin, and with the Danger thereof. (4.) By putting the Sinner upon Humiliation and Prayer. (5.) By making him wil-

ling to forſake his Sins, and by cauſing him to take up Reſolutions to forſake his Sins, and never to return to them any more.

Now I come to apply what hath been ſpoken.

Uſe 1. If Afflictions will work upon Men, and prevail with them to return to God, when all other Means are ineffectual; this may inform us how extremely bad we are, what ſinful Natures we have; how diſingenuous we are, how much our Hearts are ſet upon Sin, and how fondly in love with it we are. 'Tis a very bad Child, that will be wrought upon and be made better by nothing but the Rod: if no Perſwaſions, no wholſom Counſels, no Admonitions, no Promiſes, no Threatnings will do him any good; if he muſt be beaten and ſmart ſoundly, or he will miſcarry and undo himſelf. This is our natural Temper, this is the very Caſe of us all by Nature; nothing but Blows, and the Smart of the Rod will take off our Hearts from Sin, and make us willing to leave it. How ſhould it humble and abaſe us, and cauſe us even to loath our ſelves, that we ſhould have

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such wicked and vile Natures, that we should be so disingenuous; and that there should be such a cursed League between us and Sin; that we should have so much Kindness and intire Friendship and Affection for Sin, which is most odious to God, and most destructive to our own Souls!

Use 2. If Afflictions will work upon Men, and prevail with them to return to God from whom they have gone astray, when all other Means are ineffectual; this should reconcile us to Afflictions, and make us willing to submit to that spiritual Discipline which the most wise God thinks fit to train us up under for our Good. Why should you murmur and fret against the Lord, when his chastning Hand is upon you? Why should your Heart rise against that wholsom and necessary Severity, which he makes use of for reclaiming you? Is there not a Cause? Doth he not see that nothing else will prevail with you? What would you have him do? Would you have him let you alone, and suffer you to perish in your Sins? Be not so in love with your present Ease, as to be unwilling to suffer a little here, to

prevent

prevent your ſuffering eternally in another World. Be not ſo fondly, fooliſhly, irrationally, and madly in love with Sin, as to be averſe from undergoing any thing whereby you may be delivered from the Power and Dominion of it. Have not ſuch mean, low and unworthy Thoughts of the great and ineſtimable Mercy of being reduced from the Error of your Ways, and brought home unto God, as to think much of any Severity by which it may be effected. Certainly if you judg Sin to be the greateſt Evil, and if you be really of the mind that 'tis the greateſt Happineſs to be freed from it, and to be at Peace with God, and to be reconciled to him, you will not think any Courſe harſh, grievous and intolerable, whereby it may be attained.

I now come to a more particular Conſideration of what *Manaſſeh* did in his Affliction; *He beſought the Lord his God, and humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.*

In which Words we are informed what *Manaſſeh* did: Firſt, in general Terms, *He beſought the Lord his God*; and

and then we are more particularly informed how he ſought him, namely, by Humiliation and Prayer; *He humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers, and he prayed unto him.*

Concerning the Account in general of what *Manaſſeh* did, in thoſe words, *He beſought the Lord his God*, I ſhall ſay nothing, becauſe there is nothing in thoſe general Terms, but what is comprehended in the following Particulars, namely, *that he humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.*

Firſt, *He humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers.* In which Words there are three things conſiderable; *That he humbled himſelf*; *That he humbled himſelf greatly*; and *that he humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers.*

1ſt. *He humbled himſelf:* But when was it that he humbled himſelf? It was when God had firſt humbled him, and not till then; when God had delivered him into the Hands of his Enemies; when God had cauſed him to be carried away captive to *Babylon*, made him a Priſoner, and put him in durance there, from whence he knew not whether he ſhould

ſhould ever be releaſed, and ſet at liberty again. Whence we may obſerve, *That proud, ſtubborn and incorrigible Sinners will not humble themſelves till God hath humbled them, till by Afflictions he hath taken down their haughty Spirits and laid them low.* Wherefore you who turn the deaf Ear to all God's gracious Calls and Invitations to Repentance, and to all his ſevere Denunciations of Judgments, would you prevent God's humbling you by thoſe ſharp and heavy Afflictions which would be very grievous to you; then humble your ſelves betimes, before he takes you in hand to humble you. This is the beſt Courſe, or rather the only Courſe that you can take for preventing God's humbling you: for *if we would judge our ſelves, we ſhould not be judged.* When *Manaſſeh* lay under God's afflicting Hand, then he humbled himſelf. The Time of Affliction is the moſt proper Seaſon for Humiliation. For,

1 Cor. 11. 31.

1. Then, if ever, we ſee our Sins; our Afflictions open our Eyes, make us look about us, and help us to diſcover thoſe our Miſcarriages, which before we would not own nor take notice of.

2. Then

2. Then the Heart is ſoftned, and touched with the ſenſe of our Sins.

3. Then alſo the Sinner begins to have a ſenſe of God's Diſpleaſure againſt him for his Sins: By the Afflictions which the Hand of God hath laid upon him, he perceives that God is angry with him, which he was not in the leaſt ſenſible of before he was afflicted. Now all theſe things do not a little further our Humiliation.

Uſe. Let us therefore when Afflictions come upon us, improve that Seaſon for our Humiliation; elſe all thoſe Advantages will be loſt.

Now if you ask how we are to be active in humbling our ſelves? I anſwer,

1. By making diligent ſearch after our Sins, by labouring to find them out, and acquaint our ſelves with them: And this is no eaſy Work, conſidering our natural Blindneſs in ſpiritual things, our Unwillingneſs to know the worſt of our ſelves, our Partiality to our ſelves, and our Aptneſs to overlook our Sins.

2. By uſing our beſt Endeavours to affect our Hearts with our Sins, which is to be done by a ſerious Conſideration of

of the Nature, Quality and Aggravations of our Sins; as also of the extreme Danger attending them, and of the dismal Consequents of Sin unrepented of; and the most fearful and eternal Wrath of God which it unavoidably exposeth the Sinner unto.

3. By humble and affectionate Confession of our Sins unto God; with our most earnest and importunate Supplications to him for the pardon and forgiveness of them.

4. By judging our selves for them, and by passing Sentence against our selves, as those who have by our Provocations deserved to be disowned and cast off for ever, and to be made the miserable Objects of God's fierce Indignation to Eternity.

5. By taking up the most firm and stedfast Resolutions to cast off all our Transgressions for the time to come, and as far as God shall be pleased by his Grace to enable us, never to return to Folly any more.

Now followeth the second Particular, *He humbled himself greatly*, as he had been a very great and most heinous Sinner. And hence we may farther observe, *That*

That our Humiliation must be proportionable to the Nature and Quality of our Sins.

A little ſlight Humiliation for great and grievous Sins, is in God's account next to no Humiliation at all. Let not therefore ſuch as have been guilty of great and horrid Sins, think it is enough for them to have *hang'd down their Heads as a Bulruſh for a day or two*; as thoſe Hypocrites whoſe Carriage the Prophet deſcribes, *Jer.* 58. 5. or to have made ſome ſlight and formal Confeſſion of their Sins, when they are now juſt ready to go out of the World. This forced and half-Humiliation cannot be acceptable to God; for it argues that ſuch a Man hath neither any true ſenſe of the Hainouſneſs of his Sins, nor of the high Diſpleaſure of God againſt him for his Sins, much leſs any ſincere and firm Reſolutions to forſake his Sins, if God ſhould raiſe him up again, and lengthen out his Life for ſome longer time. That you may be duly and ſoundly humbled for your Sins,

1. Give your ſelf no Reſt until you be fully convinced of the hainous Nature of your Sins, and the various Aggravations of them by which they have been heightned: As, (1.)

(1.) That your Sins have been ſo often repeated, renewed, and acted over again and again.

(2.) That they have been committed againſt ſo many Cautions againſt them as you have had, againſt ſo many Warnings, ſo many Admonitions and Reproofs.

(3.) Againſt ſo many Chaſtiſements, and ſo much Experience of the bitter Fruits of Sin.

(4.) Againſt ſo many Mercies which ſhould have led you to Repentance.

(5.) That they have been committed againſt ſo many Purpoſes and Reſolutions, againſt ſo many Promiſes and ſerious Ingagements to the contrary, and perhaps againſt ſo many ſolemn Vows and Covenants.

2. Acquaint your ſelf with the Threatnings of God againſt thoſe your Sins, and the high Diſpleaſure of God therein manifeſted againſt you for them.

3. Be an humble Suitor unto God, that he would be pleaſed to break your Heart, and according to his Promiſe, Ezek. 36. 26. *to take away your ſtony Heart, and give you a Heart of Fleſh.* But be ſure that you be in good earneſt when you offer up

up this Suit unto God; beg this Mercy with the greateſt Importunity, or other ways never expect to obtain it; then, and then only ſhall you ſeek God and find him, when you ſhall *ſearch for him with all your Heart.* Jer. 29. 13. And though you ſhould not preſently obtain what you ſeek unto God for, yet give not over ſeeking him; if you ſeek him with Conſtancy and Perſeverance, you ſhall be ſure to ſpeed in the End: *In due time you ſhall reap, if you faint not.* Gal. 6. 9.

But you will ſay, How may a Man know that he is truly and ſoundly humbled, that his Humiliation bears ſome Proportion with the Quality and Degree of his Sins?

Anſw. 1. He that is truly, effectually and ſoundly humbled, will loath and abhor himſelf for his Sins; ſo did *Job: Behold, I am vile,* ſaith he, *what ſhall I anſwer thee? I will lay my Hand upon my Mouth.* Job 40. 4. And again; *I abhor my ſelf,* ſaith he, *and repent in Duſt and Aſhes.* Ch. 42. 6. This is that Frame of Spirit which God expects ſhould be found in a ſincerely penitent, truly humbled, and effectually reformed People; they ſhould *remember and be confounded, and never open their Mouth any more:* Ezek. 16. 63. that is, they ſhould

remember all their Abominations, be confounded in the ſerious Thoughts and Remembrance of them, and never open their Mouth any more to juſtify themſelves.

2. He that is truly, effectually and ſoundly humbled, will freely acknowledg and aggravate his Sins; he will be ſo far from extenuating and leſſening his Sins, that he will lay them open and repreſent them as fully as he can, and in his Confeſſions of them lay all the load on himſelf that he is able; he will not ſpare himſelf, or in the leaſt favour himſelf in the Charge and Indictment which he brings in againſt himſelf. Thus *David* making Acknowledgment of his Sin, gives it its full Aggravati-

2 Sam. 24. 10. ons, ſaying, *I have ſinned greatly, and I have done very fooliſhly.* And afterwards, when he ſaw the Angel of the Lord ſtretching out his Hand againſt

Ver. 17. the People, *Lo, I have ſinned, and I have done wickedly: but as for theſe Sheep what have they done? Let thy Hand, I pray thee, be againſt me, and againſt my Father's Houſe.* An unhumbled Sinner would have ſhifted off all the Blame upon others, as did *Saul*, 1 Sam. 15. 15. excuſing himſelf, he pleaded, that *the*

People

People had ſpared the beſt of the Sheep, and the Oxen, to ſacrifice unto the Lord: But *David* took all the Blame upon himſelf, and wholly exempts his People from it.

3. The Sinner that is truly, effectually, and ſoundly humbled, will juſtify God in all that is come upon him for his Sins: So *Daniel* acknowledging his own Sins, and the Sins of the People, ſaith, *To thee, O Lord, belongeth Righteouſneſs; but to us Confuſion of Face, to our Kings, to our Princes, and to our Fathers, becauſe we have ſinned againſt thee.* Dan. 9. 7, 8. This Acknowledgment he makes after a long Recital of thoſe heavy Judgments which for their Sins God had inflicted on them, thereby clearing him from any unjuſt Severity which he had exerciſed upon them. To the ſame purpoſe it is that *Ezra* making Confeſſion of his own Sins, and of the Sins of that People, freely acknowledged, that though they had ſuffered grievous things, yet they had been *puniſhed leſs than their Iniquities deſerved.* Ezra 9. 13. God had in Wrath remembred Mercy, even when he treated them with moſt Severity.

4. The Sinner that is truly, effectually and ſoundly humbled, will meekly

and patiently ſubmit to God's Corrections, and lay himſelf at the Feet of God while he is chaſtning him. He will accept of the Puniſhment of his Sin, as the Phraſe is, *Lev.* 26. 41. He will cordially ſay with the Church; *I will bear the Indignation of the Lord, becauſe I have ſinned againſt him.* He will humbly ſay with *Eli*, whatſoever his Sufferings are, It is the Lord that thus handles me; *It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good.* In like manner *David* expreſſeth his humble Submiſſion to the good Pleaſure of God, when he lay under his correcting Hand; when he fled from *Abſalom*, he ordered the Ark to be by *Zadok* carried back into the City, ſaying, *If I ſhall find favour in the Eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and ſhew me both it, and his Habitation: But if he thus ſay, I have no Delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as ſeemeth good unto him.*

Micah 7. 9.

1 Sam. 3. 18.

2 Sam. 15. 25, 26.

5. The Sinner that is truly, effectually and ſoundly troubled, will take a holy Revenge upon himſelf, in reference to thoſe things, to thoſe particular Inſtances of his Life, in which he has moſt provoked God and incurred his Diſpleaſure. To manifeſt his Indignation

2 Cor. 7. 11

nation againſt himſelf for the Sins by which he hath moſt highly diſhonoured God, he will deny himſelf ſome of thoſe lawful and innocent Liberties which he might other ways without Sin make uſe of.

It now follows in the Text, that *he humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers.* Which Words may imply either an Aggravation of his Sins, or an Incouragement to ſeek unto God for the Pardon of his Sins.

1. The Words may imply an Aggravation of his Sins, which had been committed againſt ſo many Conſiderations as might and ſhould have effectually refrained him from ſinning againſt God in ſuch a fearful manner as he had done.

As, 1*ſt.* That he had ſinned againſt ſo many good Inſtructions and Cautions againſt Sin, as his Father had given him; and againſt the pious Education which under the Care and Inſpection of ſo religious and conſcientious a Father he had enjoyed.

2*dly.* That he had ſinned againſt all the good Examples which his Father and other religious Progenitors had gi-

ven him, and againſt all the Patterns of ſincere Godlineſs and true Piety which they had laid before him, and either were or ſhould have been ſtill in his Eye.

3dly. That he had ſinned at ſuch a fearful rate, and indulged himſelf in ſuch vile and profligate Courſes, againſt all the Advantages, for better things, which all the Prayers of his Father and other godly Anceſtors had afforded him.

Uſe. Let all wicked and graceleſs Children of pious and religious Parents, conſider ſeriouſly how ſad their Account muſt needs be another Day, if they ſhall ſtill go on and perſevere in thoſe wicked and ungodly ways unto which they addict themſelves; they muſt not think to plead the Piety of their religious Parents and other Anceſtors; this ſhall be ſo far from being any Advantage to them, that it will be found to be the greateſt Aggravation of their Sins, and accordingly procure the moſt fearful Aggravation and Heightning of their Puniſhment. The moſt wicked Children are apt to pleaſe and flatter themſelves with this fond Imagination, that being deſcended from ſuch good Parents and Anceſtors, they ſhall for

their

their ſakes find Favour with God at the Great Day of their Account; and that the Children of ſuch Parents and Anceſtors, though they ſhould have lived irregularly, cannot eaſily miſcarry and periſh everlaſtingly. Let not wicked Children of good Parents deceive themſelves; if they continue and perſevere ſtill in their evil ways, they muſt know (and I deſire all ſuch to ponder it ſeriouſly) that the Piety of their Parents will be of no other Advantage to them, than only to riſe up in Judgment againſt them, and to condemn them with a more ſore and dreadful Condemnation. *John* the Baptiſt calling upon the Ungodly to break off their wicked Practices, and to *bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance*, tells them, that they muſt not think to ſay within themſelves, *We have* Abraham *to our Father*; *for God* was *able even of Stones to raiſe up Children unto* Abraham. *Abraham* wanted no ſuch Children as they were, Children that were a Diſhonour and a Reproach to their godly Anceſtors: *Abraham* would never own ſuch a wicked Poſterity for his Children, much leſs would he open his Mouth to ſpeak one Word in their Behalf when they ſhould Mat. 3. 9.

ſtand before the Judgment-Seat of Chriſt, to be accountable to him for all their Wickedneſs. The true and genuine Children of *Abraham* are only thoſe who imitate *Abraham*, and tread in his Steps; as for others he will utterly diſown and diſclaim them. And the ſame Treatment muſt all wicked Children, ſtill continuing ſo to be, expect from their godly Parents and Anceſtors; they muſt not think to ſhelter themſelves from the Judgments of God under the Piety of their Progenitors.

2. The Words may imply an Encouragement to ſeek unto God for the Pardon of his Sins, and a great Encouragement thereunto it is upon ſeveral Accounts. For,

1*ſt*. The Children of good Men are, together with their Parents, within the Compaſs of the Covenant which God makes and eſtabliſheth with his People: Thus runs the Tenour of that Covenant; *I will eſtabliſh my Covenant* (ſaith the Lord to *Abraham*) *betwixt me and thee, and thy Seed after thee in their Generations, for an everlaſting Covenant, to be a God to thee, and to thy Seed after thee.* By this St. *Peter* incourageth the

Gen. 17. 7.

wicked

wicked Jews that had ſtained their Hands with the horrid Guilt of crucifying the Lord of Life: I ſay, by this he encouraged them to Repentance for the Remiſſion of their Sins; *For the Promiſe is unto you, and to your Children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God ſhall call.* Acts 2.39.

2dly. Godly Parents make Conſcience of praying for their Children, that God would be pleaſed to pardon their Sins, to ſtrengthen them againſt their Temptations, and to beſtow his Grace and holy Spirit upon them. This Conſideration, if duly weighed, muſt needs be a ſingular Encouragement, even to the moſt wicked and ungodly Children, to become humble and earneſt Suitors unto God for the Pardon of their Sins: they may upon good Grounds hope, that all the Prayers and Supplications which their Parents have offered up unto God for them, ſhall not utterly miſcarry and be loſt.

Uſe 1. This may inform us how great a Mercy it is for Children to have been deſcended from pious and religious Parents, and how thankful unto God they ought to be for this ſingular Favour, a

Favour

Favour that cannot be sufficiently valued, and which hath its rise purely from the free Grace of God, which alone maketh one Man to differ from another, especially in Matters of this Nature, wherein the eternal Welfare of our Souls is so nearly concerned.

Use 2. Let all such Children who have been favoured with this inestimable Privilege of being descended from religious Parents, improve this Mercy to their spiritual Advantage, giving all Diligence to become Followers of their Parents, and Imitators of their Piety; to write after that Copy, and to work after that Pattern which their Parents have set them: And let them pray unto God fervently and incessantly, that they may by a holy and unblamable Conversation, approve themselves to be the true Offspring of such Parents, and be accordingly owned and acknowledged by them; and above all, that they may be owned and acknowledged of God for such, when they shall give up their Accounts to him, and receive their final
2 Cor. 5. 10 Sentence *according to what they have done*, in the Flesh, *whether it be Good or Evil.* And thus I have done with that Observation.

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The next thing to be considered, is, what *Manasseh* joined with his Humiliation under the afflicting Hand of God, namely, Prayer; *He humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.*

Whence we may observe, in the next Place, that Prayer is a seasonable and necessary Duty in the time of Affliction. *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.* Jam. 5. 13. *Call upon me in the Day of Trouble.* Psal. 50. 15. This God aims at in afflicting us, and hiding his Face from us: This is his Design in withdrawing his gracious Presence from us: *I will go and return to my Place,* saith he, *till they acknowledge their Offence, and seek my Face: in their Affliction they will seek me early.* Hos. 5. 15. Thus did God's People in the time of their Afflictions: *Lord* (saith the Prophet) *in Trouble they have visited thee: they poured out a Prayer, when thy Chastning was upon them.* Isa. 26. 16.

And divers Reasons there are why all God's People should in their Afflictions betake themselves to God by Prayer. As,

1. All Afflictions come from God; *I form Light,* saith he, *and create Darkness: I make Peace, and create Evil;* I Isa. 45. 7.

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the Lord do all theſe things. Shall there be Evil in the City, and the Lord hath not done it? Amos 3. 6. Which Words muſt be underſtood of the Evil of Affliction and Puniſhment, not of the Evil of Sin, that's an Evil whereof God who is perfectly and infinitely Good, can never be the Author. Men may be Inſtruments in our Sufferings, they may be Actors in ſubjecting us to Afflictions, and in bringing ſuch Evils upon us; but it is God that imploys them, and makes uſe of them to chaſten his People for their Sins. This is that which the Pſalmiſt intends when he calls wicked Men *God's Sword*; *Deliver my Soul from the Wicked,* (ſaith he) *which is thy Sword:* The Sword wherewith he thruſts at, wounds and pierceth, chaſtens and corrects his People, when they have by their Provocations incurred his Diſpleaſure. To the ſame Purpoſe it is that he calls *Aſſyria* the Rod of his Anger, and the Staff in their Hand his Indignation; that is, the Inſtrument of his Indignation which he makes uſe of to puniſh them for their Sins. Hence alſo it is that he calls the *Babylonians* his *Battel-Axe,* and *Weapons of War,* with which *he breaks in pieces*

Pſal. 17. 13

Iſa. 10. 5.

Jer. 51. 20.

the

the Nations, and deſtroyeth Kingdoms.

2. Becauſe God only can remove thoſe Afflictions from his People, which his Hand hath laid upon them: This God aſſumes to himſelf as his own Prerogative; *I kill* (ſaith he) *and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my Hand.* Deut. 32. 39. To the ſame Effect is that Paſſage in the Song of *Hannah*, where ſhe ſaith, *The Lord killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the Grave, and bringeth up.* 1 Sam. 2. 6. And that of *Pſal.* 68. 20. *Unto God the Lord belong the Iſſues from Death.* Hence God himſelf complains of Mens neglecting to have Recourſe to him by Prayer in their Afflictions, who alone can relieve them by removing his afflicting Hand from them; ſaying, *The People turneth not to him that ſmiteth them; neither do they ſeek the Lord of Hoſts.* Jer. 9. 13

3. Our Neglect to have Recourſe to God by Prayer in our Afflictions, blaſteth all other Means which we make uſe of for our Relief. No Queſtion can be made of it, but that *Ahaziah* having taken a dangerous Fall from a Lattice, made uſe of all the beſt Means that could be had for his Cure; but becauſe

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in that his Affliction he ſought not unto the true God, the God of *Iſrael*, for healing, but unto the God of *Ekron*, the Prophet in the Name of God tells him,

2 King. 1. 4 that he ſhould *not come down from that Bed on which he had gone up*, but ſhould *ſurely die*, as accordingly it fell out in the Iſſue. Wherefore this is noted as a great Miſcarriage in *Aſa* (though otherwiſe a good Man) that in his Diſ-

2 Chron. 16. 12. eaſe, even when it was very grievous, he ſought unto the Phyſicians, and not unto God.

4. It concerns us in our Afflictions to ſeek unto God by Prayer, in regard of the great need we have of his Help and Aſſiſtance many other ways in the time of our Afflictions. As,

1*ſt*. To teach us his meaning in thoſe Afflictions with which he exerciſeth us; what he deſigns in them; and what at ſuch a time he expects from us.

2*dly*. To ſanctify Afflictions to us, and to enable us to improve them to our ſpiritual Advantage.

3*dly*. To ſupport us under our Afflictions.

4*thly*. To give us Patience under his afflicting Hand, and to keep us from murmuring, repining, diſcontent, fret-

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ting againſt God, and all other ſinful Diſtempers, which in regard of the Corruption of our Nature, and the evil Frame of our Hearts, we are ſubject unto in our Afflictions.

Theſe Particulars I have only mentioned, leaving it to every Man to inlarge on them in his private Meditations, as he ſhall ſee cauſe.

Uſe. Seeing we are upon ſo many Conſiderations obliged and highly concerned to ſeek unto God in our Afflictions, let us all be cautioned to take heed that we neglect not the Duty of Prayer while God's afflicting Hand is upon us, and when, if ever, this Duty is both moſt ſeaſonable and moſt neceſſary. As ſoon as ever any Affliction from the Hand of God begins to light on us, let us immediately betake our ſelves unto God by Prayer; let this be the firſt thing we do, and let us never think of making uſe of any other means in order to our Relief, till this be done: neither let us reſt here, but let us continue to pray without ceaſing, as long as God thinks good to continue his afflicting Hand upon us and ours. Thus doing with Conſtancy and Perſeverance, we

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need not queſtion but that we ſhall ſee a good Iſſue out of our Afflictions, whatever they be, in God's appointed time; but in all our Afflictions let us not only pray, but labour to be ſoundly humbled for our Sins, which have been the meritorious Cauſe of all our Sufferings; let us earneſtly beg the Pardon of them, and Strength againſt them for the future. This is the beſt Courſe that we can take in our Afflictions, and the only Courſe that can give us any Security, that we ſhall be in due time delivered out of our Afflictions, and be delivered with ſuch Advantages to our Souls, as ſhall give us juſt Cauſe to acknowledg that it hath been good for us to have been afflicted; and that God hath in Faithfulneſs chaſtned us, as *David*, after his Afflictions, profeſſed and acknowledged; *Pſal.* 119. 75.

Now follows the fifth Particular, namely, the Iſſue of *Manaſſeh*'s Prayer; *God was entreated of him, and heard his Supplication, and brought him again to* Jeruſalem *into his Kingdom. Then* Manaſſeh *knew that the Lord he was God.* Moſt ſad and doleful was the Condition of *Manaſſeh*, while he was a Captive in

in *Babylon*; he was bound with Chains, and fettered with Irons; he was confined to the dark and uncomfortable Vaults and Cloyſters of a Priſon; and though perhaps in regard that he was not of the common ſort of Priſoners, but a King, he might have better Accommodations than many others; yet which was worſt of all, he had ſmall or no Hopes of being ever releaſed or ſet at Liberty again; and which was the Height of his Miſery, he had no Security for his Life, but was perpetually in Danger, and upon that Account under Fears of being drawn out of Priſon, and brought to Execution every Day and every Hour. This was his diſmal and deſperate Condition, than which nothing could eaſily be more ſad and rueful; but notwithſtanding all this God wonderfully appeared for him, and reſcued him out of his Miſery.

And hence we may obſerve;

That there is no Condition ſo ſad, ſo diſconſolate, and ſo diſmal, but that God can afford a Man Relief therein, and will do it if he be duly ſought unto.

Jonah upon Prayer was delivered out of the *Belly of Hell*, as he calls it; a dark Priſon, or rather a Dungeon. Jonah 2. 2.

When the *Iſraelites* ſhould by their Sins have ſo far provoked God as to be made the Objects of his fierceſt Indignation, and to be puniſhed ſeven times and ſeven times, and ſeven times more for their Iniquities; yet after all this, God promiſed them Mercy upon their ſound Humiliation, and ſincere Repentance. So again, when all the Curſes of the Law ſhould have overtaken and ſeized on that ſinful People; and when for their monſtrous Provocations God ſhould have diſperſed them, and ſcattered them amongſt the Nations, and driven them even to the uttermoſt Parts of the Earth; yet if after all this they ſhould return to the Lord, and obey his Voice, he promiſeth to turn their Captivity, and to gather them out of all Places whither he had ſcattered them. He is graciouſly pleaſed to aſſure them, that if any of theirs ſhould be driven out to the uttermoſt Parts of Heaven, from thence would the Lord their God gather them, and from thence would he fetch them.

Lev. 26. 40, 41, 42.

Deut. 30. 2, 3, 4.

There are two Branches of this Point.

1. He can afford Relief in the moſt deplorable and deſperate Caſes, for he

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is all-ſufficient; He wants neither Wiſ- Gen. 17. 1.
dom nor Power to compaſs and work out the Deliverance of his People, how forlorn or deplorable ſoever their Condition may ſeem to be.

1*ſt.* As for Wiſdom; *He is the only wiſe God*, 1 Tim. 1. 17. *His Underſtanding is infinite*, Pſal. 147. 5. *He knows how to deliver the Godly*, 2 Pet. 2. 9.

2*dly.* His Power is equal to his Wiſdom. *Nothing is impoſſible with God*, Luke 1. 37. *Nothing is too hard for him*, Gen. 18. 14. *He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think*, Eph. 3. 20. He is never at a Loſs, though we be.

2. As he can, ſo he will afford Relief in all Caſes, if he be duly ſought unto, at leaſt ſo far as ſhall be moſt for his own Glory, and our real Benefit and Advantage. For,

1*ſt.* The more ſad any Man's Condition is, the more ready is he to relieve him, and the greater Compaſſion hath he for him: *Like as a Father pitieth his Children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him.* Pſal. 103. 13.

2*dly.* The more ſad any Man's Condition is, the more Glory will re-

dound to God from relieving him.

Now to apply this in a Word. The proper Use of this Point is to incourage us to look up to God, and to be humble Petitioners to him for Relief in all our Distresses, never despairing of obtaining Succour as long as we have such an one to have recourse unto.

But to go on with the Text, which informs us, that *God was entreated of him, and heard his Supplication, and brought him again to* Jerusalem *into his Kingdom.* He was entreated of him, not only so as to release him out of Prison, and to bring him back again into *Jerusalem* into his Kingdom, but so as to pardon his great and hainous Provocations, by which he had drawn that Misery upon himself: for that *Manasseh* was a true Penitent, we have all the reason to believe, not only in regard that it is said of him, that *he humbled himself greatly*, but also that upon his Return to *Jerusalem*, he *took away the strange Gods and the Idol out of the House of the Lord, and all the Altars that he had built, and cast them out of the City, and commanded* Judah *to serve the Lord God of* Israel. These were Fruits and Evidences of the Truth of his Repentance.

Now

Now whereas such an one as *Manasseh* obtained the Pardon of his Sins; we may observe, *That the greatest Sinners may find Mercy with God if they duly seek it.*

This great Truth (for such it will be deemed by all that are truly sensible of their Sins) may be confirmed several ways.

1. From Instances of such notorious Sinners as have upon their Repentance obtained the pardon of their Sins. Instances whereof are,

(1.) *Manasseh*, here in the Text, whose most hainous and abominable Provocations are at large described, 2 *Kings* 21. 2 *Chron.* 33.

(2.) The Woman mentioned, *Luke* 7. 37, 38. and so on to the end of the Chapter. This Woman is there said to have been a Sinner, that is, a notorious and infamous Sinner; one that was known to be a lewd and vitious Woman all the Town over; insomuch that *Simon* the Pharisee, who had invited Christ to his House, took great offence at it, that he should suffer a Woman of such ill Report to come near him, as we may see, *ver.* 39. and yet this lewd and vicious Woman, upon her sincere

Repentance, obtained the forgiveneſs of her Sins, whereof our Saviour aſſures her, *ver.* 48. ſaying unto her, *Thy Sins are forgiven thee.*

(3.) The Thief on the Croſs, is another Inſtance of Mercy obtained at the Hands of God by a great Sinner, upon his ſound Humiliation and unfeigned Repentance; *Luke* 23. 40,41,42,43.

(4.) Another Inſtance hereof may
Act. 19. 19 be in thoſe who are ſaid *to have uſed curious Arts*, that is, who addicted themſelves unto Magick and Judicial Aſtrology. Many of theſe are ſaid to have brought their Books together, (that is, their Books of Magick and Judicial Aſtrology) and to have *burned them before all Men*, thereby teſtifying the truth of their Repentance; upon which, without all queſtion, they obtained the pardon of thoſe their great and horrible Offences.

(5.) Another Inſtance may be in thoſe notorious Sinners, a black Catalogue whereof we have, 1 *Cor.* 6. 9,10. namely, *Fornicators, Idolaters, Adulterers, Effeminate, Abuſers of themſelves with Mankind, Thieves, Covetous, Drunkards, Revilers, Extortioners.* Concerning which monſtrous and prodigious Offenders

fenders the Apoſtle adds, *v.* 11. *And ſuch were ſome of you; but ye are waſhed, but ye are ſanctified, but ye are juſtified in the Name of the Lord Jeſus, and by the Spirit of our God.* The Sum of all is, That as bad as they were, and as notoriouſly wicked as they had been, they obtained converting, pardoning and ſanctifying Grace.

(6.) S. *Paul* may be another Inſtance hereof, who though (according to his own acknowledgment) he had been *a Blaſphemer, a Perſecuter, an injurious Perſon, and the chief of Sinners*; yet upon his *Repentance he obtained Mercy.* 1 Tim. 1. 13, 15.

(7.) Another Inſtance may be in thoſe wicked Jews that crucified the Lord of Life; three thouſand whereof being converted by St. *Peter*'s Sermon, obtained the forgiveneſs of that horrid Sin. Acts 2. 36, ---41.

2. That great Sinners may upon ſound and ſincere Repentance obtain the pardon and forgiveneſs of their Sins, may be confirmed ſeveral other ways: As,

(1.) Becauſe Mercy is promiſed to the greateſt Sinners, upon their Repentance; *Iſa.* 1. 16, 17, 18. & 55. 7. *Ezek.* 18. 27, 28. & 30. 31, 32. *Mat.* 12. 31.

(2.) Promiſes of Pardon made unto penitent and believing Sinners, run in general Terms; *John* 3. 16. *Mark* 16. 15,16. *Acts* 10. 43.

(3.) Chriſt invites all that feel the Burden of their Sins, to come unto him, promiſing them Eaſe and Refreſhing if they come; *Mat.* 11. 28. *John* 7. 37,38. *Rev.* 22. 17.

(4.) Chriſt expoſtulates with Sinners, and complains that they come not to him for Mercy; *John* 5. 40. *Mat.* 23. 37.

(5.) He declareth and profeſſeth that he will reject and put off none that ſhall come unto him; *John* 6. 37.

Uſe 1. This Truth is Matter of very great Encouragement to the chief of Sinners to come to Chriſt, and to be humble Suitors to him for the pardon of their Sins. They ſee that pardoning Mercy has been obtained by many of the greateſt Sinners, that the Promiſes of finding Mercy with God upon condition of Faith and Repentance, run in general Terms, excluding none that are ſo qualified: they ſee that Chriſt moſt graciouſly invites all ſorts of labouring and heavy-laden Sinners, without exception,

ception, to come unto him; that he expoſtulates with Sinners, and complains that they will not come unto him that they may have Life: and laſtly, that he declareth and profeſſeth that he will caſt out none that come unto him, that come unto him in a due manner, and as they ought to come; that is to ſay, with unfeigned and ſincere Repentance for their Sins paſt, and with firm Reſolutions and ſincere Endeavours to caſt off and forſake their Sins for the time to come. Now what more can the greateſt Sinners wiſh or deſire, to encourage them to ſeek Mercy at the Hands of God, than that they may reſt aſſured that they ſhall not loſe their labour, that they ſhall not ſeek him in vain, but certainly obtain what they are Suitors to him for? But here however, they muſt be careful to ſeek him, (1.) Seaſonably; *Iſa.* 55. 6. 2 *Cor.* 6. 2. *Heb.* 3. 15. (2.) Earneſtly and importunately; this manner of ſeeking God is that which prevails with him, eſpecially when we ſeek unto him for ſo great a thing as is the forgiveneſs of our Sins; *Jer.* 29. 13. (3.) Abandoning, forſaking and caſting off all their Tranſgreſſions, *that Iniquity may not be their Ruine.* Ezek 18. 30.

Ruine. If thus they come unto Christ, and seek Mercy at his Hands, (as hath been said before) Christ will in no wise turn them off with a Repulse, but assuredly and without fail entertain them graciously, and give them to find Mercy with him in the pardon and forgiveness of their Sins.

But here desponding and discouraged Sinners be apt to object several things.

Object. 1. Saith the Sinner that is deeply affected and sadly cast down with the sense of his Sins, *None ever obtained Mercy, that sinned as I have done.*

Answ. (1.) That is a very rash and unadvised Speech, (as I have elsewhere shewed at large:) Do you know all the Sins which all the penitent Sinners that ever found Mercy with God, have been guilty of?

(2.) Consider and ponder a little better the Instances before-mentioned. Are your Sins greater than the Sins of *Manasseh?* Are your Sins greater than the Luk. 7. 37, 38. Sins of that Woman, who was notorious for her Lewdness all the City over? Are your Sins greater than the Sins of all those foul and abominable Sinners, which the Apostle reckons up, 1 *Cor.* 6. 9, 10?

(3.) If

(3.) If your Sins have been really greater than the Sins of any of these, or all of them together; yet are they greater than the boundless Mercies of God, and the Merits of Christ? Take heed how you entertain such a Thought.

(4.) Are your Sins so great, as that they are without the compass of all the Promises made to believing and penitent Sinners? Far be it from you to harbour such black Thoughts concerning your Condition. If you had upon you the Guilt of all the Sins that ever have been committed since the Fall of *Adam* to this day, yet if you could sincerely repent of them all, cast them all off, and truly believe in Christ, you might be sure of the pardon of them: for so universal and unlimited, of so large a compass and extent are the Promises of Mercy which are made to all believing and penitent Sinners, that they would extend to them all, and take them in. This is so clear and evident, that no Exception can be made against it, unless by one that will be satisfied with nothing that can be laid before him, or offered him for his Satisfaction.

Object. 2. *But I have run on so long impenitently, and rejected so many Offers of*

of Mercy, that I fear there is no Mercy, there can be none for me.

Anſw. (1.) Doth not God call and invite ſuch as well as others? Are not his gracious Calls and Invitations to Repentance general? Are they any where reſtrained, or clogged with any Limitations? Are they any where narrowed and ſtraitned with the exception of any ſorts of Sinners whatſoever?

(2.) How many of thoſe in the Old Teſtament and in the New, that had long gone on in a ſinful Courſe impenitently, obtained Mercy at length, notwithſtanding the long-continued Perſeverance in their evil Ways?

(3.) Do not the Promiſes of Mercy to be obtained by penitent and believing Sinners, extend to ſuch as well as unto others? Where are they by any Scripture excluded from Mercy? And if the holy Scriptures exclude them not, why ſhould they exclude themſelves?

(4.) Doth not our Saviour aſſure us, Mat. 12. 31 that all manner of Sin and Blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto Men upon their Repentance? (for that is ever in this matter ſuppoſed, though not expreſſed.) Now if all manner of Sin and Blaſphemy ſhall upon Repentance be forgiven unto

unto Men, then undoubtedly no truly humbled and ſincerely penitent Sinners ſhall be denied the Forgiveneſs of their Sins, how long ſoever and how obſtinately ſoever they have gone on in their ſinful Practices.

Object. 3. *But I fear I may not belong to the Election of Grace; and if ſo, then all my Endeavours to find Mercy with God would be fruitleſs.*

Anſw. 1. You ought not to neglect your known Duty, becauſe you cannot dive into God's ſecret Decrees: though you know not what God's ſecret Counſels and Purpoſes may be concerning you, yet he hath plainly and ſufficiently revealed what your Duty is, and what he requires of you, in order to your Salvation. It concerns you therefore not to trouble your Mind about God's ſecret Purpoſes concerning you, but to apply your ſelf with all holy Diligence to the conſcientious Performance of your Duty; and ſo doing, to caſt your ſelf upon the free Grace and Mercy of God in Chriſt: *Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but things revealed belong to us, and to our Children, that we may do them.* Deut. 29. 29.

2. If

2. If you perform your Duty as you ought, God will be ſure to perform his Promiſes; you may depend and build upon it, that if you be not wanting to your Duty, he will never fail to deal with you according to his Word: *Heaven and Earth ſhall paſs away, but* his *Word ſhall not paſs away.* What God hath ſpoken, ſhall certainly take Effect.

Mark 13. 31.

3. This is the beſt Courſe, indeed the only Courſe which you can take to be ſatisfied concerning your Election. When you find in your ſelf the Work of Grace, and the Fruits of true Faith and ſincere Repentance, true Holineſs and univerſal Obedience, a ſtudious and holy Care, and endeavour to pleaſe God in all things, and to decline and avoid whatſoever is diſpleaſing unto him; when you find theſe things in your ſelf, you may thence certainly and infallibly conclude, that you are one of thoſe who belong to the Election of Grace: for theſe things wrought in the Heart, are Fruits and Effects of God's electing Grace, and can be found in none but ſuch as are his Children, his Elect, *ordained to eternal Life,*

Acts

Acts 13. 48. *Eph.* 1. 4. 1 *Theſſ.* 1. 4, 5. 2 *Theſſ.* 2. 13. *Rom.* 8. 29, 30. *Col.* 3. 12. So then the Graces of the Spirit, and that holy Change which is wrought in the Hearts of all ſound and ſincere Converts, are Evidences of their eternal Election, as may be gathered from the Scriptures laſt mentioned; and therefore he that ſhall lay aſide and neglect his known Duty, and reſolve to do nothing towards his Salvation until he knows his own Election, muſt unavoidably periſh, becauſe his Election cannot be known, but by the Fruits and Effects thereof, appearing in the Holineſs of Mens Lives and Converſations.

4. How many thouſands, perhaps Millions, of glorified Saints may there be in Heaven, who never made this Scruple, or at leaſt never ſuffered it ſo far to prevail with them, as to hinder and withhold them from giving all Diligence to make their Calling and Election ſure, by an earneſt Endeavour after Faith, Repentance, Holineſs, and all other Graces accompanying Salvation?

And

And ſo I come to the *6th* and laſt thing in the Words, namely, What *Manaſſeh* gained, or what he learned by all this: *Then* Manaſſeh *knew that the Lord he was God.* We may not think that *Manaſſeh* was wholly ignorant of God before; ſome kind of Knowledg of God he had, but he had no ſuch experimental and effectual Knowledg of God, as by theſe God's Dealings with him he attained. That Knowledg of God which neither works upon the Heart, nor reforms the Life and Converſation, is little better than perfect Ignorance of God. It is ſaid of the Sons of *Eli*, that they were *Sons of* Belial, *and knew not the Lord*: They knew not the Lord to any purpoſe; they knew him not in ſuch a manner as they ought to have known him; and this was *Manaſſeh*'s Caſe; while he went on in his ſinful Courſes, and would not be reclaimed, he knew not the Lord. Whatever Knowledg of God he might have, it ſignified nothing in God's Account. But *Manaſſeh* by thoſe ſore Afflictions which God brought upon him, gained an experimental Knowledg of God's Power

1 Sam. 2. 12.

Power to ſubdue and humble the moſt ſtout and obſtinate Sinners, of his Juſtice and Holineſs in puniſhing Sin, of the Truth of his Threatnings and Denunciations of Judgments againſt Sinners; of his gracious and merciful Diſpoſition to pardon Sin, and to be reconciled to the greateſt Sinners upon their ſound Humiliation and ſincere Repentance; of God's abſolute Dominion and uncontrolable Soveraignty over the higheſt among Men, pulling them down, laying them low, and raiſing them up again, as it ſeems good in his Eyes. The experimental Knowledg of all theſe things in God, and relating to him, did *Manaſſeh* gain by that ſevere Courſe which God took with him, for bringing him home to himſelf, when gentler Means would not prevail. All this may be implied in thoſe Words, *Then* Manaſſeh *knew that the Lord he was God.*

Now to apply this very briefly.

Uſe 1. This ſhould reconcile us to Afflictions, and make us willing to come under that ſevere Courſe of Diſ-

cipline which is ſo beneficial to us, and by which we gain ſo much.

Uſe 2. It ſhould alſo teach us to improve our Afflictions, ſo as we may profit by them, and to obſerve what we gain by our Sufferings; for Gainers we ſhall be, if we be not wanting to our ſelves.

This is apparently God's End in bringing them upon us, who as a wiſe and careful Inſpecter, and a gracious Father, orders all things to our Advantage. And it becomes us to obſerve the ſame Method, and accordingly to improve what he ſo graciouſly intends for our Good; to be humble and patient to ſubmit to his fatherly Chaſtiſements, and to repent of thoſe Sins he chaſtiſes us for.

The

The Eighth Sermon.

LAM. 3. 39, 40.

Wherefore doth a living Man complain, a Man for the Puniſhment of his Sins?

Let us ſearch and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.

THE main Scope of theſe Words is to direct us how we ſhould carry our ſelves in time of Affliction. The Direction which is here given us, conſiſts of two Parts.

1. We are informed what we muſt not do; we muſt not complain: 'tis moſt unreaſonable and unlawful to complain, whatever our Afflictions be. So much is at leaſt implied in that interrogatory Form of Speech, *Wherefore doth a living Man complain, a Man for the Puniſhment of his Sins?*

2. We are taught what is to be done, and what Courſe we ought to take when we are afflicted; We muſt *ſearch and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.* So then the former part of the Direction is negative, the latter affirmative.

As to the former of theſe, ſome apprehend there is a ſpecial Emphaſis in thoſe Words, *Wherefore doth a living Man complain?* But all do not underſtand and explain that Emphaſis in the ſame manner. *Wherefore doth a living Man complain?* that is, as ſome conceive, why doth any Man living complain of his Troubles and Afflictions, ſeeing 'tis the common Lot and Condition of all Men while they live here, to be ſubject to Afflictions, Man being
Job 5. 7. *born unto Trouble, as the Sparks fly upward,* as *Eliphaz* ſets forth the Calamitous Condition of Man in this World? Why ſhould any Man living complain of that which befals all others as well as himſelf, and which none may ever hope to be exempted from as long as they live upon this Earth? Others explain the Emphaſis thus; *Why doth a living Man complain,* ſay they; foraſmuch as while he is alive, whatever his Sufferings be, he is mercifully and favourably

vourably dealt with? If he were treated according to the Deſert of his Sins, he ſhould no longer be a living Man; he ſhould be cut off from the Land of the Living, and caſt into Hell. Either of theſe Senſes is agreeable enough to the Analogy of Faith; but of the two the latter beſt ſutes with the principal Intendment of this Place, and with what follows in the latter Clauſe of the Verſe; *Why doth a living Man complain, a Man for the Puniſhment of his Sins?* So long as there is no Evil that in this World befals a Man, but what hath Relation to Sin, and muſt be looked upon as a juſt Puniſhment thereof; what reaſon hath any Man living to complain, as if he were hardly dealt with? But then to the end we may not miſtake the meaning of the Words, we muſt conſider what kind of Complaint is here condemned. In our Afflictions ſome ſorts of complaining are allowed us; yea ſome Complaining is ſo far from being unlawful, that 'tis our Duty.

1*ſt.* It is lawful to expreſs what we feel and ſuffer in thoſe ways which Nature it ſelf (I ſpeak not now of ſinful and depraved Nature) prompts unto us. So Groanings and Sighings, and

louder Outcries, ſometimes in Extremity of tormenting Pain, are but as it were the Voice of Nature thus making Diſcovery of its Preſſures, and as it were endeavouring to eaſe it ſelf. And no doubt but there is ſome little Relief in that kind of Complaint: for Nature would be more oppreſs'd if it always ſtifled and ſuppreſs'd its Inclinations to give Vent to its Anguiſh by complaining. And moreover, the Strength of Nature would be ſooner waſted and ſpent, if ſo much of it muſt be always exerted and put forth to the utmoſt to keep in and impriſon its Sorrows. We ſee God hath furniſhed unreaſonable living Creatures, at leaſt many of them, with ſome kind of natural Language whereby the Creature is able to complain when it ſuffers. And as for Man, what is purely natural to him, cannot be any part of his Sin: for the Creator never infuſed Sin or any Principle of ſinful Depravation and Irregularity into any of his Creatures. What I have now ſaid, may be of uſe to ſome who in Extremity of Anguiſh and bodily Pain are troubled at thoſe Complaints which they cannot but give way to, and are apt to charge them on themſelves as their

their Sin. There may be Complaints, and such as have a special Accent upon them; there may be loud Cries, and yet no Sin in all this. *David* speaks of his roaring, *Psal.* 22. 1. and so again, *Psal.* 32. 3. But though he roared all the day long, as in the Place last mentioned, yet we cannot thence necessarily infer that he was impatient. He was a holy and a patient Man, who being often enforced to cry out through the Sharpness of his exquisite Pain, said, *Though I roar, yet I do not murmur.* You may cry out, and it may be roar also, from the Anguish of your Pain, and yet it's possible there may not be the least sinful Discomposure of your Spirit, or rising of your Heart against God so laying his Hand upon you.

2dly. We may lawfully and freely complain to those that are about us, to our Friends, Relations and Acquaintance; we may lay open our Griefs, and represent our Sufferings to the full, with all the Circumstances of them, when and where there is just Occasion. And this may be very necessary and beneficial, both in reference to them and our selves: For besides the present easing of our Hearts by this Discovery of our

Troubles, we hereby make them ſenſible of our Condition, and kindle in them thoſe Compaſſions towards us, which our preſent Condition calls for: we ſtir them up to Prayer for us, and give them occaſion of exerciſing all thoſe Graces which the Afflictions of others call forth and imploy. But here we muſt take heed that in our Complaints we make not our Afflictions greater than they are; that we aggravate them not beyond the juſt Meaſures and true Weight of them; a thing too ordinary with the Afflicted, eſpecially in ſome Caſes.

3*dly*. We may in our Afflictions complain to God alſo as well as to Men. 'Tis our Duty to ſpread our Condition before him, imploring that Relief from him, which his Hand alone is able to reach forth unto us. Not as if he were ignorant of our Eſtate or Concernments, but he would have us ſo to manifeſt that we are ſenſible of his Hand upon us, and that we have no Expectation of Relief from any elſe but him.

4*thly*. The Servants of God have not only a Liberty of making their Complaints to God in their Afflictions, but alſo of humbly expoſtulating with him about

about them, provided that it be done in a due manner, and ſo as the Diſtance between God and his Creature be obſerved. We have frequent Examples hereof in Scripture. Sometimes holy Men expoſtulate with God concerning the Grievouſneſs and Severity of their Afflictions: Sometimes concerning the Length and Duration of them; ſometimes concerning the Inſtruments which God makes uſe of to correct them; ſometimes concerning his ſeeming to caſt off all Care of them in their Afflictions, neither minding their Sufferings, nor regarding their Prayers: *Is my Strength the Strength of Stones, and is my Fleſh of Braſs?* ſaith *Job*, chap. 6. 12. *Why haſt thou ſet me as a Mark againſt thee, ſo that I am a Burden to my ſelf?* Job 7. 20. *How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord, for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy Face from me?* ſaith *David*, Pſal. 13. 1. *O Lord God of Hoſts, how long wilt thou be angry againſt the Prayer of thy People?* Pſal. 80. 4. *Where is thy Zeal and thy Strength, the Sounding of thy Bowels, and of thy Mercies towards me? Are they reſtrained?* So expoſtulated the Church with God, *Iſa.* 63. 15. *Wherefore doth the way of*

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the VVicked proſper? and wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherouſly? ſaid the Prophet *Jeremiah*, chap. 12. 1. But though the Servants of God take the Boldneſs thus to expoſtulate with God, yet they do not charge him fooliſhly, or lay any Imputation of Unjuſtice or inequitable Rigour on his Providences, unleſs when they are under ſome preſent Diſtemper, as ſometimes it may ſeem to have been with *Job* and the Prophet *Jeremiah*. They evermore, when in their proper and right Frame, aſcribe Righteouſneſs to their Maker, and the meritorious Cauſe of all their Sufferings to themſelves. And ſo in thoſe darker Providences in which they could not diſcern the Reaſons of God's Diſpenſations, or the Equity of his Proceedings, yet they ſtill adhered to this as a Principle not to be queſtioned, that God was Righteous. This the Prophet *Jeremiah*, when about to expoſtulate with God, addreſſeth himſelf thereunto with this Preface, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy Judgments*: And then he goes on with the Expoſtulation before-mentioned; *VVherefore doth the way of the VVicked proſper? and where-*

wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? So the Prophet *Habakkuk* also makes the like Preface to his Expostulation; *Thou art of purer Eyes* (saith he) *than to behold Evil, and canst not look upon Iniquity: Wherefore lookest thou on them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy Tongue when the Wicked devoureth the Man that is more righteous than he?* And the same holy Frame of Spirit should there be in us: Though we may in some Cases take the Liberty of humble and reverent Expostulation with God, yet we must take heed of any unmeet Reflections upon his Justice or Goodness, and still remember our Distance from him, that *God is in Heaven, and we are upon Earth*, as *Solomon* speaks, *Eccles.* 5. 2. And that *he giveth not account of any of his Matters*, as *Elihu* excellently represents him to *Job*, chap. 33. 13. Hab. 1. 13.

So then all these sorts of Complaints being allowed us, the Complaint condemned in the Text, is that which either proceeds from, or is joined with Impatience under God's Hand, and Discontent with his Providence; 'tis the Complaint of an unquiet and sinfully disturbed Spirit, which the Scripture

ture ſometimes expreſſeth by murmuring: ſo here the Word in the Original may properly enough be tranſlated, and ſo the ſame Word is rendred, *Numb.* 11.

1. Now the Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of this kind of Complaint under the Hand of God, may appear ſeveral ways.

1. 'Tis long before God takes the Rod in Hand to correct: he bears long even with the vileſt of Sinners, and exerciſeth much Patience towards them; *He is ſlow to Anger, and of great Mercy*, Pſal. 145. 8. *He is merciful and gracious, long-ſuffering, and abundant in Goodneſs*, Exod. 34. 6. He takes no Delight in Severity, further than we provoke him thereunto: *He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men*, Lam. 3. 33. And ſhould not this Conſideration be of Force to ſuppreſs all our diſcontented Complainings and Murmurings, that God is ſo unwilling to uſe Severity againſt us; that he is ſo hardly drawn on to chaſten us, and that he never doth it till we have given him much Cauſe ſo to handle us?

2. When we by our many Provocations have put the Rod into his Hand, he

he is ſoon prevailed with to lay it aſide again: He is not of that implacable Temper, that he can never be reconciled to thoſe againſt whom he hath once taken up any Diſpleaſure. Upon our humble Submiſſion to his Corrections, and ſincere Reſolutions and Endeavours to reform what hath been amiſs, he is graciouſly inclined to lay aſide his Diſpleaſure: *He is ready to forgive:* moſt ready to ſhew Mercy as ſoon as we are in any meaſure fit for Mercy. He doth not always chide, nor *keep his Anger for ever.* Was this only *David*'s particular Experience? and is it not ours alſo? Do not we find how eaſy he is to be entreated, and how ready to pardon? Have we not had manifold Experiments thereof in the Courſe of our Lives? And ſhould not this perſwade us quietly and patiently to ſubmit to his Corrections, while he is pleaſed to keep us under his chaſtning Hand? Pſal. 86. 5. Pſal. 103. 9

3. While he judgeth it fit to correct us, he lays no more upon us than our Sins deſerve. When we are moſt ſeverely handled, and are apt to complain we have hard meaſure, yet even then do not his Severities in the leaſt exceed the Demerits of our Sins: God doth us no

no wrong; nor is it poſſible that he ſhould, for his Will is the Rule and Meaſure of Righteouſneſs: *The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his VVorks*, Pſal. 145. 17. *The juſt Lord will not do Iniquity*, Zeph. 3. 5. What Cauſe then is there, or can there be of complaining where no Wrong is done? With this the Church of God ſilenceth her ſelf, and ſtops her own Mouth when under the moſt dreadful Effects of God's
Lam. 1. 18. Diſpleaſure: *The Lord is righteous*, ſaith ſhe, *for I have rebelled againſt his Commandments.* And with this God ſtoppeth the Mouth of his People; *VVhy*
Jer. 30. 15. *crieſt thou for thine Afflictions? Becauſe thy Sins were increaſed, have I done theſe things unto thee.*

4. When God afflicts moſt grievouſly, his Severities are far ſhort of what our Sins deſerve. Under the heavieſt Weight of Puniſhment *Ezra*'s Acknowledgment in the Name of the Church
Ezra 9. 13. muſt be ours; *VVe are puniſhed leſs than our Iniquities deſerve.* Our Sins deſerve not only all the temporal Plagues and Judgments which we are capable of undergoing, but Hell, the unutterable and endleſs Torments of the Lake, that burns with Fire and Brimſtone. Where-

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fore whatever our Sufferings be in this World, ſo long as we are on this ſide Hell, ſo little Cauſe have we to complain, that we have great Cauſe to be thankful that it is not far worſe with us than it is.

5. How much ſoever God is pleaſed to afflict us, yet ſtill we enjoy many Mercies in the mean time, by which the Bitterneſs of our Afflictions is much allayed, and the Smart of them much abated. For one or two Croſſes we are compaſſed about with Variety of Bleſſings: In Sickneſs we have the Pity and Compaſſion of Friends and Acquaintance; we have all that Service and Aſſiſtance that many Hands about us can afford us; we have all thoſe Means of Relief that either Love or Art can ſupply us with: And all this, beſides thoſe inward and powerful Supports which we have more immediately from God. Again, if it ſo be that God afflicts us in one of our Relations, we have Matter of Comfort in divers others of them. If we have Loſſes in our temporal Eſtate, yet our ſpiritual and better Concernments are ſafe and untouched. If Man be at Variance with us, yet we have Peace with God.

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How ſadly ſoever we may in our Afflictions repreſent things to our ſelves, God never ſtirs up all his Wrath againſt us at once, nor ſuffers his whole Diſpleaſure to ariſe. God never ſo mingles the Cup which he puts into our Hands, but that there are ſome Ingredients of a benign and friendly Nature to qualify the Malignity of the reſt. The Malignity did I ſay? There is indeed no real Malignity in any of the Ingredients of that ſpiritual Phyſick which God adminiſters to his. All things have a kind and beneficial Influence for promoting our Good, and furthering our higheſt Intereſt. And where now is there any Place left for complaining? Amidſt ſo many Mercies, can we yet find in our Hearts to complain? Be it ſo, that ſome things are not only unacceptable, but very grievous to us; *Shall we receive Good at the Hands of God, and ſhall we not receive Evil?* Shall we bear nothing at the Hands of him who is ſo good and gracious, ſo kind and bountiful to us many other ways? Let us not ſuffer two or three Afflictions ſo to imbitter our Spirits, and vitiate our Palats, as that we ſhould not reliſh the Sweetneſs of any of thoſe Mercies, which

which in our moſt afflicted Condition we ſtill enjoy.

6. Add to all this, that God hath a Sovereignty of Power and Dominion over his Creatures, by virtue whereof he may deal with them as he pleaſeth. According to this his abſolute Power, though the Creature had never ſinned, yet God might expoſe it to ſuch Miſeries as exceed not the Benefit of that Being he has given it. He that made the Creature out of nothing, as he might turn it into nothing again if he pleaſed; ſo continuing it in being, he might lay any ſuch Pain or Anguiſh upon it without relation to Sin. We ſee what Anguiſh the unreaſonable Creatures endure, which yet are not capable of Sin: And why might not God inflict the like on any rational Creature, though no Sin had occaſioned it, or made way for it? It is not eaſy to give a Reaſon why he might not: for even an innocent Creature, being a Creature however, muſt of neceſſity be in Subjection to the Power and Dominion of the Creator, from whom it received its Being. 'Tis true, ſuch Evils could not then have the Nature of Puniſhment, becauſe Pu-

niſhment, properly ſo called, hath relation to Sin; but yet there could be no Injuſtice in ſuch a Diſpenſation, no more than when by many tormenting and lingring Pains God takes away the Lives of brute Beaſts, whoſe Nature is not a Subject capable of Sin or moral Evil.

Now in ſuch a Caſe the Creature would have no juſt Cauſe to complain or murmur, becauſe no Injury could poſſibly be done it by God's uſing that juſt and rightful Power and Dominion which he hath over the Work of his Hands. Whence we may thus argue to our preſent Purpoſe: If God's abſolute Power over the Work of his Hands be ſuch as calls for humble Submiſſion to his Providence, and ſilent bearing of whatever he inflicts; how much more ſhould his Juſtice ſtrike us dumb, and effectually reſtrain us from all murmuring or muttering againſt him? If we ought not to complain or murmur though we had no Sin, how much leſs reaſon have we to do it when we have ſo much? Upon this Conſideration it was that the Church took up her Reſolutions of patient Submiſſion to the Hand of God; *I will bear the Indigna-*

Micah 7. 9.

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tion of the Lord, becauſe I have ſinned a-gainſt him.

Now I come to apply what hath been ſpoken.

Uſe 1. Let us in all our Afflictions obſerve the Frame of our Hearts, and be humbled for all the ſecret Grudgings and Riſings of our Spirits againſt the Providence of God: And eſpecially if the inward Diſtempers of our Souls ſhould be at any time ſo great as to break forth and vent themſelves in any unmeet Language; if our inward Diſcontents and Heart-burnings ſhould diſcover themſelves by complaining and murmuring againſt God, and by making ſuch Repreſentations of him to others, as if he had dealt hardly with us, and as if we might have expected other meaſure at his Hands.

This is a Miſcarriage which we are very apt to run into when our Afflictions are ſevere and laſting, when they ſmart much and continue long. But however it fare with us, the Sinfulneſs of our murmuring againſt God is ſo great, that no Circumſtance of our Sufferings can render it excuſable; and therefore we cannot be ſufficiently humbled for it.

To the end we may the better discover the Evil of it, and see what reason there is why we should be humbled for it, let us first look upon it in its Cause, and the Root whence it springs; then let us behold it as it is in it self, and consider it in its formal Nature: And lastly let us view it in its Effects and Consequents.

1. Let us look upon it in its Root. We loath and abhor some things the more when we know whence they are, and what gave Birth to them; the wicked Offspring for the cursed Mother that bare it and brought it forth.

Now the Root of our murmuring is our Pride; we have entertained too good an Opinion of our selves; we think we have deserved better things at the Hands of God, and therefore we murmur and complain as if we were injured. Were we throughly sensible of our Sinfulness; were we convinced that we are worthy of far sorer Evils than those which we groan under, instead of murmuring, we would not only accept of the Punishment of our Sins, as the Phrase is, *Levit.* 26. 41. take in good part, meekly and patiently bear whatsoever God lays on us, but from

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our Hearts acknowledg that we are mercifully and kindly dealt with in that no more is inflicted on us.

2. If we behold it as it is in it ſelf, and conſider the formal Nature of it, our murmuring is in effect nothing elſe but a Degree of Inſurrection and Rebellion againſt God. As diſcontented Subjects, or mutinous Souldiers ſharpen their Tongues againſt their Prince or General, and thereby heighten their own and other Mens Diſcontents, to diſpoſe them to make Reſiſtance: So when we murmur againſt God, we ſet our Mouths againſt Heaven, doing what in us lies to ſtrengthen in our ſelves, and inſtil into others Principles of Diſaffection againſt the higheſt Majeſty, and to withdraw them with whom we converſe from their Obedience and Loyalty.

3. Let us view it in the Effects and Conſequents of it. We are ſo far from eaſing our ſelves by murmuring, that it both increaſeth and prolongeth our Afflictions.

1*ſt*. It increaſeth them; for our Unquietneſs and Stubborneſs under God's Hand provokes him to lay more Load upon us; that is all we gain by our Un-

towardneſs; as the Child that ſtruggles, ſwells and murmurs when he is corrected, doth but thereby procure to himſelf the more Stripes.

Beſides, our fretting and murmuring doth of it ſelf make thoſe our Afflictions much more grievous, which might be undergone with Eaſe, if with humble Silence and Patience we ſubmitted our ſelves to the Chaſtiſement of our heavenly Father.

2dly. It alſo prolongs our Afflictions; for our murmuring diverts us, and takes us off from applying our ſelves to that Courſe, which, if any thing, would put a ſpeedy End to our Troubles. And that is the Courſe which we are put upon in the Text, namely, a ſerious Reflection upon our ſelves, and a diligent Search and Enquiry after the Sins which have procured our Afflictions, and a turning from them unto God whom we have forſaken.

As long as we are taken up in murmuring, this Work is not minded, and ſo our Afflictions are protracted and drawn out to a greater length than they ſhould have been, if inſtead of murmuring againſt God we had ſeaſonably and narrowly ſearched into our Hearts

and

and Ways, found out our Sins, judged our ſelves for them, and forſaken them.

Thus we ſee what Reaſon we have to be humbled for this Sin.

But though in theſe Reſpects all that are guilty of it have Cauſe to be humbled; yet have they moſt reaſon to be humbled for murmuring, who have leaſt reaſon to murmur: ſuch as are,

1. Great and notorious Sinners, whoſe Offences and Enormities have been ſuch, that whatſoever they ſuffer, unleſs they be wilfully blind, or ſtrangely partial to themſelves, they muſt be inforced to confeſs that they ſuffer juſtly. Should they complain of hard meaſure, who are ſo bad that no Puniſhment is ſevere enough for them? And yet theſe are oft-times as ready to complain as any elſe.

2. Thoſe who have drawn ſuch Afflictions upon themſelves, as in which they may plainly read their Sin written in legible Characters. The unclean Perſon who hath by his lewd Courſes brought thoſe Evils upon himſelf, which are the proper Effects and Puniſhments of that Sin: The great Oppreſſor of others, that is through God's righteous Judgment fallen into the mercileſs

Hands of Oppreſſors himſelf: The Extortioner, that having raiſed an Eſtate by Rapine and Violence, hath lived to ſee the Extortioner catch all that he hath: The falſe Accuſer, who having by Lies and Slanders robbed others of their good Name and Eſtates, is now fallen under the Laſh of thoſe falſe Tongues that ſpare him no more than he hath ſpared others. Have any of theſe reaſon to murmur againſt God's Providence? Should not their own Guilt ſtifle their Complaints, and ſtop their Mouths? Or, if they will open them, ſhould it not be to give Glory to God's Juſtice, by whoſe over-ruling and moſt righteous Providence it hath come to paſs, that they ſuffer either in the ſame kind in which they have offended, or in that which correſponds, and bears a viſible Proportion with it?

3. When Men ſuffer that which they have often been forewarned of; when they have met with many Caveats and Cautions; when it hath been often foretold them what the certain Conſequents and unavoidable Iſſues of ſuch Courſes would be, and yet they would preſumptuouſly go on, and ruſh into Danger, as the Horſe ruſheth into the

Bat-

Battel. Have these Men Reason to complain of any but themselves? If Men will run into the Briars, and none can withhold them, have they any cause to complain that they are scratch'd and torn? And yet even in such Cases as this, the Circumstances whereof a Man would think are such as leave a Man no colour of complaining; yet will Men find out Matter of Complaint even against God himself, their Hearts rising against his Providence, that he should thus leave them to themselves, and suffer them to go on so wilfully and fool-hardily upon Danger. As if God were bound to cure all Man's Perverseness, and to subdue his Obstinacy; and as if it were God's Fault that Man will not hearken to good Counsel.

If obstinate and refractory Sinners will run upon their own Ruine notwithstanding all Warnings, they must know their Destruction is of themselves, and they have none to thank for it but themselves.

4. When the Evils under which Men lie, are the direct and proper Issues and Products of their own impatient Desires and most importunate Prayers: when Men beg things of God, and pur-

purſue them with reſtleſs Importunities, and will take no Denial whether the things be good for them or no; if having obtained them, they reliſh nothing but Gall and Wormwood in them, inſtead of the Content and Satisfaction they promiſed themſelves; where can they juſtly lay the Blame but on themſelves? Have they any Plea to juſtify their murmuring againſt God, who indeed gave them their Deſires in Anger, and gratified them to their Smart, becauſe nothing elſe would ſatisfy them? They would be their own Carvers, and take upon themſelves to underſtand what was good for them better than God. If *Rachel*'s longing for Children be ſo impatient that ſhe muſt have them or ſhe will die, if God give her a Child that ſhall coſt her her Life, what reaſon hath ſhe to complain of any but her ſelf, and the impetuous Irregularity of her own Deſires, that ſhe purchaſed it at ſo dear a rate? If the Iſraelites muſt have Quails, and no other Food will pleaſe their inordinate Palat; if they eat till they ſurfeit of them, till they come out of their Noſtrils, and the next News be that the Plague is among them, ſhall they yet

charge

charge God fooliſhly, and lay the Blame upon him? If the boundleſs Deſires of the ambitious Man aſpire to a Crown, and nothing elſe will ſatisfy him: when he hath gotten it, if he find it lined with Thorns, can he murmur at Providence that hath ſet it on his Head?

If murmuring be any where unreaſonable and unjuſt, then certainly 'tis when Men ſuffer in thoſe very things which were the Objects of their moſt paſſionate Deſires and unwearied Importunities. But yet,

5. After all that hath been ſaid, they have leaſt Reaſon to complain, and of all others have leaſt to juſtify their Murmurings, who have the beſt and moſt effectual Arguments to quiet their Spirits under every Providence, and to keep down all the inordinate Workings of their Hearts. And ſuch are all they who having obtained the Pardon of their Sins, have an Intereſt in God's ſpecial Love and Favour through Chriſt. For,

1*ſt*. They may know that whatever befals them, Sin being pardoned, the Curſe and Sting of every Affliction is taken out: Though their Afflictions may be bitter and grievous to Nature,

yet

yet there is no Poiſon in them, nothing of a hurtful or deſtructive Nature:
Gal. 3. 13. Chriſt hath removed the Curſe, being made a Curſe for us.

2*dly*. They may know that all their Sufferings are intended for their Advantage, not for their Prejudice, and ſhall undoubtedly be advantagious to them in the End, however for the preſent they may not ſo clearly diſcern God's particular Deſign and Intendment in them. God hath aſſured them, that *all*
Rom. 8. 28. *things work together for Good to them that love God, to thoſe that are called according to his Purpoſe.*

3*dly*. They are ſure to be ſupported under all their Preſſures. They may ſometimes be hardly put to it, but yet they ſhall never want Supplies of Strength proportionable to their Burdens. God will mercifully conſider their Weakneſs, and lay no more upon them than he will enable them to bear. He
1 Cor. 10. 13. is faithful, and will not ſuffer them to be tempted above what they are able.

4*thly*. They are ſure to be eaſed of their Afflictions in God's due time: *The Rod of the Wicked ſhall not reſt upon the Lot of the Righteous*; it ſhall not always reſt there, *Pſal.* 125. 3. *Many*

are

are the Afflictions of the Righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all, Pſal. 34. 19.

5*thly.* Tho their Afflictions ſhould run parallel with their Lives, and have no other End than by Death, yet the endleſs and unſpeakable Happineſs of the World to come will be an abundant Compenſation for all their Afflictions here, *The Sufferings of this preſent time being not worthy to be compared with the Glory that ſhall be revealed in us.* Rom. 8. 18.

Now, I ſay, if ſuch as have theſe excellent and ſovereign Cordials, theſe ſolid Grounds of Conſolation, theſe efficacious Means of quieting their Hearts, and ſuppreſſing all their ſinful Diſtempers, ſhould yet murmur under the Hand of God, their Murmuring of all others would be moſt inexcuſable. If ſuch ſhould murmur, what might be expected from them who have none of theſe things to charm and compoſe their Spirits? Well might they *gnaw their Tongues, and blaſpheme the God of Heaven for Anguiſh, becauſe of their Pains*; as the Carriage of ſome of the Wicked in their Afflictions is deſcribed, *Rev.* 16. 10, 11.

But

But let not us by our unquiet and im-
patient Demeanure under the Hand o
God, diſhonour our Profeſſion, and diſ
parage thoſe excellent Grounds of Tran
quillity and Calmneſs of Spirit unde
every Diſpenſation of Divine Provi
dence, which our Religion ſupplies an
furniſheth us with. Let it appear tha
we are above all thoſe things which u
wont to diſturb the Minds, and di
compoſe the Spirits of them that kno
not God, and are Strangers to the Co
venant of Grace, and have no Acquai
tance with the Privileges thereof.

Uſe 2. In the ſecond Place, let us a
eſpecially ſuch of us as have the
Grounds of inward Peace, Quiet, ſile
Contentment, and humble Submiſſio
to the good Pleaſure of God in all ou
Troubles; I ſay, let us be exhorted t
keep our Hearts in an even, quiet an
undiſturbed Temper under all Pro
dences. Such a Frame, how comfort
ble would it render every Condition t
us! How light and eaſy would it mak
every Burden and Preſſure to us! An
how much Sin would it prevent, whic
the fretting of our Hearts againſt th
Lord, as *Solomon* expreſſeth it, *Pro*

19. 3. and the tumultuous Fermentings of our Spirits againſt his Providence, would hurry us into.

In the further Proſecution of this Uſe, I ſhall firſt propound a few things for the quieting of our Hearts in Afflictions; and then I ſhall anſwer ſome of thoſe Pleas or Objections which unbroken and unruly Spirits, not ſufficiently ſubdued to God, make uſe of to juſtify their Exceſſes.

In order to the quieting of our Hearts amidſt all our Trials, and to the taming of our rebellious Spirits,

1. Let us get our Hearts fully poſſeſſed of the abſolute Sovereignty and Dominion which God hath over us. Such is his Power over us, that we and all the Nations of the World are in his Hands but as the Clay in the Hand of the Potter, as God makes the Compariſon, *Jer.* 18. 6. He may form us and faſhion us, do with us and diſpoſe of us as he ſees good: Neither need he render any other Reaſon or Account of what he doth, than that of his own good Pleaſure. Now as the Apoſtle argues, *Rom.* 9. 20, 21. *Shall the thing formed ſay to him that formed it, Why haſt thou made me thus? Hath not the Potter*

Potter Power over the Clay, to make one Veſſel unto Honour, and another unto Diſhonour; one for a baſer Uſe, another for a more honourable Service? Let this reſt and abide upon your Heart, that God hath this Power over you; and you will judg it no leſs unreaſonable and intolerably ſaucy, that you ſhould murmur or conteſt with God about his Dealings with you, than that the Clay ſhould riſe up and conteſt with the Potter.

2. Keep alive in your Heart a Senſe of God's Love in every Diſpenſation. Black Thoughts of God, and our repreſenting him to our ſelves as our Enemy, and every of his Chaſtiſements as Fruits of his Hatred, cannot but leaven our Hearts with ſuch a ſullen Moroſity and Sowrneſs, as will make us ſeek all Opportunities of quarrelling with him. We take nothing well at the Hands of him whom we take to be our Enemy, becauſe we look upon all his Actions through the Glaſs of that Image which we have framed of him in our Minds. So while we look upon God as our Enemy, 'tis not to be wondred at that we ſhould be ready to pick Matter of complaining againſt him, and conteſting

with

with him, out of all the Paſſages of his Providence.

But on the other hand, good Thoughts of God, and a lively Senſe of his Love upon our Hearts, would make whatſoever he doth to look of another Colour. Viewing his Providences through theſe Spectacles, we ſhould read his Kindneſs in whatſoever he doth to us or about us; and we ſhould be inclined to make the beſt Conſtruction of every thing that ſeems to be of a doubtful Aſpect. And how powerfully would this ſubdue our Spirits, ſweeten our Affections, and make us willing to bear with Silence and Quietneſs thoſe things which to another would be intolerable?

3. Labour to have always a freſh Remembrance of your Sins. To this purpoſe it might be of good Uſe to us, to ſingle out ſome of our chief Sins, by which we have moſt diſhonoured God, and wounded our Conſciences, and to have them always in a Readineſs by us, that they may preſently occur to our Thoughts, when at any time our Hearts begin to riſe againſt God in reſpect of any of his Dealings.

This would furniſh us with Matter of Arguments to reaſon down the rebel-

lious Inſurrections of our Spirits, as ſoon as ever they begin to take Diſtaſte at any thing that God hath done. Should ſuch as we, ſo vile, ſo ſinful, ſo unworthy, as in ſuch and ſuch Inſtances of our Provocations we have appeared to be, take pet at any thing that God doth? Have we done as bad things as we could againſt him, and is it for us to be complaining of any thing that he doth?

4. Add to all this the Conſideration of the extream Danger of quarrelling with God, and oppoſing our ſelves againſt him. Dare we provoke the Lord?

1 Cor. 10. 22. *Are we ſtronger than he?* ſaith the Apoſtle. Dare we challenge him into the Feild, and run upon the thick Boſſes of his Buckler? Let us *remember the*

Job 41. 8. *Battel, and do no more,* as God cautioned *Job* in the like Caſe. *Wo unto*

Iſa. 45. 9. *him that ſtriveth with his Maker: let the Potſherd ſtrive with Potſherds of the Earth.* Let not us frail Creatures contend with God who can daſh us in pieces; yea turn us into nothing in a Moment.

And ſo I come to ſpeak to thoſe Pleas whereby ſome endeavour to juſtify their complaining.

Object.

Object. 1. *My Afflictions*, ſaith one, *are ſuch as never any Man was exerciſed with the like, all things conſidered: I could, I hope, with ſome Degree of Quietneſs and Silence bear any other Croſſes; but here I muſt be allowed to give way to ſome Diſtemper when my Croſs is ſingular.*

Anſw. 1. Whereas you ſay, never any Man was afflicted as you are, you ſpeak raſhly and unadviſedly. Are you ſo well acquainted with the ſeveral Afflictions of all the Afflicted that at preſent are, or ever were in the World, that you ſhould pronounce ſo peremptorily, that never any was afflicted as you are? Alas! your Knowledg reacheth but a little way. How many are there within the Compaſs of a few Miles, it may be within the Limits of the ſame Town or Pariſh where you live, whoſe particular Caſes, and the various Circumſtances of whoſe Afflictions you are perfectly ignorant of?

2. How many have had the very ſame Thoughts of their Afflictions beſides your ſelf? 'Tis indeed every Man's Temper in great Afflictions, and under dark Providences, to ſay with the Church, *Lam.* 1. 12. *Behold and ſee if*

there be any Sorrow like unto my Sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the Day of his fierce Anger.

In ſore Afflictions we are not competent Judges of the Matters that concern our Sufferings; no more than a ſick Man is a competent Judg of the Eſtate of his Body, when his Diſeaſe hath gotten Poſſeſſion of his Head, and diſturbed his Fancy.

Again, whereas you ſay you ſhould bear any other Croſs with more Calmneſs and Silence; you ſpeak as one neither acquainted with your own Weakneſs, nor with the Deceitfulneſs of your Heart.

1*ſt*. Your Language bewrays your ſmall Acquaintance with your Weakneſs: You know not what Frailty you might diſcover if God ſhould try you ſome other way, though it ſhould be with a far lighter and more favourable Affliction. We are never throughly acquainted with our Weakneſs till we be tried. All our Strength lies in God; if he be pleaſed to ſtand by us, to ſupport and ſtrengthen us, we may bear, we may eaſily and comfortably bear the greateſt Affliction; if he withdraw the

the Influences of his Supports, and the Supplies of his Grace, the ſmalleſt Affliction will worſt us.

Do we not obſerve how ſtrong we are ſometimes to conflict with great Trials, and how weak other-while, when far ſmaller and leſs conſiderable Afflictions encounter us? Who makes us thus to differ from our ſelves, but God, as he either vouchſafeth us his Preſence and powerful Aſſiſtances, or withholdeth them?

2dly. You ſpeak as one too much a Stranger to the Deceitfulneſs of your Heart: You think you could bear any other Affliction better, and that no other thing could have ſo diſcompoſed you, and put you out of order; but herein your falſe and guileful Heart deludes you. If you were afflicted in ſome other kind, your Heart would then be as likely to tell you that you could bear any other Affliction better than that: Your preſent Affliction would ſtill be judged the moſt difficult to be born.

You are like a ſick Man who complains of the Bed on which he lies, and thinks he ſhould be better at eaſe if he lay any where elſe: but when he makes

trial of another Bed, he ſtill finds himſelf as reſtleſs and uneaſy as he was before: He now finds 'tis the Diſtemper of his Body, not the Uneaſineſs of his Bed, that makes him reſtleſs.

You think you ſhould bear another Affliction better, and more like a Chriſtian; but as long as your Heart is unſubdued to God, and the unquiet and rebellious Diſtempers of your Spirit remain and ſtick cloſe to you, it is not to be queſtioned but that you would be as unquiet, and as apt to complain and murmur under any other ſharp Affliction as under this. 'Tis the Change of your Heart, and not the Change of your Affliction, that muſt diſpoſe you to a patient Undergoing of your Burden.

Object. 2. *But*, ſaith another, *I ſee others as bad as my ſelf, not ſo ſeverely chaſtned: God ſeems to ſingle me out, and to ſet me up as a Mark to ſhoot at, and to direct all his Arrows againſt me: He makes me a Spectacle of his ſevere VVrath, and the only Inſtance of his fierce Indignation. VVhy ſhould I be ſo grievouſly puniſhed while others eſcape?*

Anſw. 1. You do not well underſtand your ſelf, nor remember the Diſtance between God and you. While you thus com-

complain, what is this but to contend with the Almighty, and to quarrel with him as if he were your Equal or Inferiour? Is he to be accountable to you for his Actions? Muſt he treat you and other Men as you ſhall judg fitting? Muſt he manage the Government of the World as you would have him? And will you be angry and fall out with him if he doth not?

This is not a Deportment becoming the Creature towards its Creator. An humble Acknowledgment of your Sin, and a Profeſſion of your Reſolution to reform, were more agreeable to your Condition, and the Circumſtances under which you ſtand towards God. *Surely it is meet to be ſaid unto God, I have born Chaſtiſement, I will not offend any more. That which I ſee not, teach thou me; if I have done Iniquity, I will do no more.* So *Elihu* judged, *Job* 34. 31, 32.

2. Are you the only Inſtance of God's Severity? Are there not many more to be ſeen, if you look abroad and caſt your Eyes up and down the World? Though God's Patience and long-Sufferance be admirable for the preſent, and though he hath thought fit to put over the Puniſhment of the greater part of Offences

to the Judgment of the great Day; yet in the mean time he ſo conſults the Honour of his Juſtice here, as not to leave the World without many ſignal Inſtances of his Severity againſt Sin. And if it ſeem good to him to make you one of thoſe Inſtances, what have you to object againſt it? Is he not at liberty to make uſe of what Inſtances he pleaſeth? If he had thought fit to let you paſs unpuniſhed, and inſtead of you had pitched on any other, might not that other Perſon have had as good a Plea for complaining as you now think you have?

It ſeems by your Exceptions againſt God's Providence, that he muſt either puniſh all Offenders here, or none. This is the Rule which you would ſet him for the Exerciſe of this Part of his Government of the World: and if he do not obſerve it, you will conteſt with him about it, and have from him an Account thereof.

3. If God make choice of you to vindicate the Honour of his Juſtice and Holineſs before the World, and to take off ſome part of that Imputation, which, in the Judgment of carnal Wiſdom, from his Patience, ſeems to lie upon his Juſtice;

Juſtice: if in you, as in one remarkable Inſtance, he will let the World ſee how much he hates Sin, and with what exact and ſevere Righteouſneſs he intends to judg the World hereafter, ſhould you murmur at it? Should you not rather be well contented that God might have any Honour by your Sufferings? that you who have by your Sins ſo much diſhonoured him, ſhould be capable of ſuffering any thing whereby any ſlender Reparations might be made to his Honour? Were you not made for his Glory? and if you would not be perſwaded to promote it by doing, were it not better you ſhould contribute to it by ſuffering, than that you ſhould wholly loſe the End of your Creation?

4. Conſider whether your complaining of God's Severity againſt you, while he deals more favourably with many others, be not a clear Evidence that your Heart is not throughly humbled for Sin. The Apoſtle, among other Fruits and Evidences of true Repentance and godly Sorrow for Sin, makes mention of *Indignation* and *Revenge*. An holy Indignation which the truly humbled Sinner, the true Penitent, hath againſt himſelf, for having ſo grievouſly

2 Cor. 7. 11.

vouſly offended God, and an holy Revenge which he takes upon himſelf on that Account. How widely different are complaining and murmuring from that holy Frame of the penitent Sinner which the Apoſtle deſcribes? When you ſuffer your Heart to riſe, and give your Tongue liberty to murmur againſt God, you ſeem to direct the Edg of your Indignation and Revenge againſt him, rather than againſt your ſelf.

A due Senſe of your Sin, and of the Diſhonour you have done to God thereby, would make you even out of an holy Indignation and Revenge againſt your ſelf, humbly and patiently to ſubmit to the utmoſt of that Severity which God is pleaſed to exerciſe towards you.

5. Remember how ill God took it from his People the Jews, that they complained the Way of the Lord was not equal; which is in effect your Complaint: Concerning this he complains and expoſtulates with them;

Ezek. 18. 25. *Ye ſay, The Way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O Houſe of* Iſrael, *Is not my Way equal? Are not your Ways unequal?* And ſo again, *ver.* 29. And then he adds, *ver.* 30. *Therefore will I judg you, O Houſe of* Iſrael, *every one according to his*

his Ways, ſaith the Lord God: repent and turn your ſelves from all your Tranſgreſſions, ſo Iniquity ſhall not be your Ruine. As if he had ſaid, Whereas ye complain of the Inequality of my Dealings with you, unleſs you repent I will deſtroy you all; and then you will have little Cauſe to complain of my inequal Dealings. They who complain of the Inequality of God's dealing with them, had need take heed leſt God *lay Judgment to the Line, and Righteouſneſs to the Plummet*, as he threatens, *Iſa.* 28. 17. Leſt he lay heavier things upon them; leſt he bring ſuch Judgments on them as ſhall come up more nearly to the Meaſures, the Proportion and Demerits of their Sins. How much ſoever they have ſuffered, God may yet lay much more upon them, and yet ſtill puniſh them much leſs than their Iniquities deſerve.

6. Whereas you complain that God deals more ſeverely with you than with many others, think with your ſelf,

1*ſt*. That 'tis poſſible your Sins may have been greater than the Sins of ſuch as you have in your Eye; greater in reſpect of the Circumſtances and Aggravations of them: It may be they never ſinned

ſinned againſt ſo much Light, and ſo many clear Convictions; againſt ſuch Mercies, and ſo many Diſcoveries of God's Love; againſt ſo many Warnings and gentler Chaſtiſements; againſt ſo many ſeverer Stroaks, when milder Courſes would not prevail. Can you wonder at it that God deals more ſeverely with you than with others, if upon Examination it ſhould be found that your Sins have been greater than theirs?

2*dly*. It may be God intends you more Good than many others. By ſorer Afflictions he means to make you better, and ſo much the better as your Afflictions have been and are greater. His Chaſtnings, though ſevere, are no Evidences of his Hatred, but Fruits of his Love, and of his Purpoſe to do your Soul much Good by them; for *whom* Prov. 3. 12 *the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a Father doth the Son in whom he delighteth.*

3*dly*. What if the time for correcting ſome others be not yet come? even they who have been hitherto ſpared, or been dealt very gently with, may hereafter, if milder Remedies do no good, be as ſeverely dealt with as you have

have been. God takes his own Time, and makes uſe of his own Methods for diſciplining all his; and ſome he ſees good to handle after one manner, ſome after another, as to his Wiſdom ſeems beſt.

4*thly*. What if ſome of thoſe, who are for the preſent ſpared, ſhould be reſerved to the Judgment of the laſt Day, while you are chaſtned here, that you may not be condemned with the World hereafter. God may ſpare ſome others in Anger, and correct you in Mercy; for his forbearing to puniſh is ſometimes no Fruit of his Favour, but an Effect of his higheſt Diſpleaſure, according to that, *Pſal.* 81. 11, 12. *My People would not hearken to my Voice, and* Iſrael *would none of me: So I gave them up to their own Hearts Luſt.*

Object. 3. *But my Troubles are long and tedious,* ſaith another; *there is no End of them. I have been waiting and waiting for Deliverance, but it comes not. I ſee others in Trouble, and I ſee them come well out of it; but my Feet ſtick faſt in the Mire.*

Anſw. To this I anſwer, 1. That it is not your Caſe alone: Did not the People of God take up the like Complaint?

Jer. 8. 20. plaint? *The Harveſt is paſt, the Summer is ended, and we are not ſaved.* The time when we expected Deliverance is over, and yet we are ſtill where we were; our Afflictions are ſtill lengthened out. Was there not a time when Iſa. 49. 14. *Zion* ſaid, *The Lord hath forſaken me, my Lord hath forgotten me?* Was there not a time when *David*, after he had been long praying for Deliverance, and Pſal. 69. 3. waiting, ſaid, *I am weary of my crying, my Throat is dried, mine Eyes fail, while I wait for my God?* Wherefore have no hard Thoughts of God, much leſs give way to murmuring againſt him, who deals no otherwiſe with you, than he often deals with many of his own.

2. Is not the Cauſe of God's reſpiting your Deliverance in your ſelf? Are not you ſtill unfit for Mercy? and is not that the true reaſon why you have it not? *God delighteth in Mercy*, Mich. 7. 18. *He waiteth to be gracious*, Iſa. 30. 18. How ready God is to ſhew Mercy to us, when we are ready and prepared to receive it, he hath declared in the moſt pathetical way of Expreſſion; *O* Pſal. 81. 13,—16. *that my People had hearkned unto me, and that* Iſrael *had walked in my Ways; I ſhould ſoon have ſubdued their Enemies,*

and

and turned my Hand againſt their Adverſaries: The Haters of the Lord ſhould have ſubmitted themſelves unto him; but their time ſhould have endured for ever. He ſhould have fed them with the fineſt of the VVheat, and with Honey out of the Rock ſhould I have ſatisfied thee. And to the ſame Purpoſe is that, *Iſa.* 48. 18. *O that thou hadſt hearkned to my Commandments; then had thy Peace been as a River, and thy Righteouſneſs as the VVaves of the Sea.*

So then we may thank our ſelves that in our Afflictions we wait ſo long for Deliverance. Our Mercies never meet with any Obſtructions in God, but in our ſelves. We by our Continuance in Sin, by our Remiſneſs and Slackneſs in the Work of ſound Humiliation and Reformation, retard and ſet back our Mercies; and then we complain and murmur, as if God were ſlack and unmindful of his Promiſes; as if he were hardly drawn to ſhew Mercy.

3. Deliverance out of Trouble is of God's free Grace; we cannot challenge it at his Hands. We bring our ſelves into Trouble by our Sins, and he may juſtly leave us to periſh in our Troubles. He therefore who doth all that he

he doth for us out of free Mercy, may take his own time to do it, when he pleaſeth. Is it fit that we who are unworthy of any good thing, who can demand nothing of him, ſhould preſcribe Times and Seaſons to him; and as if we required a Debt of him, ſet him a Day when he ſhould ſhew Mercy?

4. His own Time is the beſt Time. It may ſeem long to us that we wait, and ſtill our Expectations are fruſtrated; but our long waiting ſhall turn to our greater Advantage in the end; and we ſhall then ſee, that if we had obtained our Mercies ſooner, we ſhould have had leſs Mercy in them. God's Mercies are then moſt ſweet, and yield moſt full Content and Satisfaction, when they are fully ripe, and come in their proper Seaſon. 'Tis with them as with Fruit, if it be plucked before it be ripe, it's either wholly unſavory, or much leſs acceptable. We loſe much of the Comfort of our Mercies, unleſs we can be contented to wait for them till they come to Maturity.

Object. 4. *Though my Afflictions be very ſharp,* ſaith another, *and ſuch as would try the Patience of any Man, yet I think*

think I could bear them without much complaining, if the Inſtruments of my Sufferings were any other than ſuch as they are. To ſuffer by the Hands of ſuch baſe and unworthy Perſons, is a Circumſtance which I cannot think of without Indignation.

Anſw. But 1. This hath oft-times been the Lot of the beſt Men. No worſe Man than *David* complained that *he was the Song of the Drunkards*, Pſal. 69. 12. and that *the Abjects gathered themſelves together againſt him*, Pſal. 35. 15. And *Job* ſaid, that thoſe *had him in deriſion, whoſe Fathers he would have diſdained to have ſet with the Dogs of his Flock*, chap. 30. 1. We are not better than theſe holy Men who met with this Meaſure in the World.

2. God may take what Inſtruments he pleaſeth to correct you with. Is it meet the Child ſhould chuſe the Rod with which the Father ſhould chaſten him?

3. 'Tis not to be doubted but that he makes uſe of the fitteſt Inſtruments. Should the Veſſel that needs ſcouring, complain againſt him that ſcoureth it, that he uſeth ſuch filthy, rough and grating Materials, rather than ſome

clean, neat, ſmooth and gentle thing? If he ſhould make uſe of ſuch Materials as theſe, they would do no good: He knows thoſe other are fitteſt to get off the Dirt and Filth, which ſtick ſo faſt that gentle Means will not remove them. So God on purpoſe makes uſe of foul and rugged Inſtruments, as fitteſt to rub off that ſinful Corruption and Filth that cleaveth ſo faſt unto our Nature.

To be ſhort; if we might be allowed to chuſe the Inſtruments by which God ſhould chaſten us, we would be ſure to chuſe thoſe from whoſe Hands we might ſmart leaſt, and who would conſequently do us leaſt Good. 'Tis well for us, if we can think it ſo, that when God ſees cauſe to correct us, he hath a right to chuſe his Rod.

But here ſome might ſay, The Baſeneſs of the abject and contemptible Condition of the Perſons from whom I ſuffer, doth not ſo much trouble me, as that they are thoſe from whom I deſerved better things: I have obliged them by whatever Kindneſſes I was capable of conferring on them; and when they have ſerved themſelves of me, they kick at me. 'Tis not what I ſuffer from them, but their Ingratitude that I am impatient of enduring. *Anſw.*

Anſw. Ingratitude indeed is an odious Sin in whomſoever 'tis found; and uſually God ſome time or other meets with the ungrateful Perſon, and pays him in his own Coin. *Whoſo rewardeth Evil for Good, Evil ſhall not depart from his Houſe.* Pro. 17. 13 'Tis ſeldom ſeen but that firſt or laſt, he that hath been notoriouſly ungrateful to his Benefactors, hath the ſame Meaſure returned into his Boſom by thoſe who have received Kindneſſes from him.

But however, ſuch odious Perſons as theſe God makes uſe of; and many times he makes them the Inſtruments of his Corrections rather than others, becauſe he ſees no other ſo fit for his Purpoſe.

1. It may be ſometimes in the good Offices we do others, we look more upon Man than upon God; we look more after Mens due Reſentment of our Kindneſſes, and their thankful Acknowledgments of them, and the anſwerable Returns they ſhould make us, than after God's Acceptance of us therein. Were our Eyes more upon God, and leſs upon Men; did we ſhew Kindneſs, and perform Offices of Love to Man in obedience to God, and ſatisfy our ſelves with his Acceptance for the preſent,

and encourage our ſelves with the Expectation of thoſe Rewards of our ſincere Obedience which he hath promiſed hereafter, we ſhould neither be ſo often diſappointed of thoſe Returns which we expect from Men, neither ſhould we be ſo much troubled at Diſappointments in that kind when we meet with them. If Men prove thankful, we ſhould take it well, and bleſs God for it; if they prove unthankful, we ſhould quiet our ſelves in God's Acceptance of what we have done, as the chief thing which we looked after.

2. God may ſometimes correct us by the Ingratitude of Men, that he may thereby mind us of our Ingratitude towards himſelf. Wherefore when Man's Ingratitude is ſo grievous and afflicting to us, let us reflect upon our ſelves, and think how much more diſpleaſing our Ingratitude muſt needs be unto God, who hath done a thouſand times more for us than ever we did for any Perſon living, whom we look upon as moſt obliged by us. If we therefore think we have juſt cauſe to complain of Man's Ingratitude towards us, how much greater cauſe hath God to complain of our Ingratitude towards him! in whom we

we live and move, and have our being, and from whoſe ſole Bounty we have received whatever good thing we have at any time enjoyed, or do enjoy. And yet notwithſtanding all theſe Obligations, what hath our whole Life been but one continued Courſe of Provocations, and an uninterrupted Series of thoſe many ill Requitals which we have made him?

If we juſtify our ſelves, and ſay we cannot be juſtly charged with Unthankfulneſs towards God, we hereby plainly diſcover that we have never taken a juſt Account either of our Receipts from him, or of the Returns which he hath had from us.

Object. 5. *But I have a continual Succeſſion and Series of Afflictions: God followeth me with one Trial after another: When one Affliction is but juſt over, preſently another is in a readineſs to ſeize upon me. I have no ſooner obtained a little time to recover Breath, but I am again alarmed to prepare my ſelf for a new Conflict. This is that which tireth out my Patience, and makes me even weary of my ſelf.*

Anſw. 1. 'Tis poſſible that former Afflictions, tho many and great, have

not ſufficiently humbled you, nor mortified Sin in you. Tho ſomething may have been done upon you, yet God hath not accompliſhed his whole Work upon you; ſo that what hath been begun by former Trials, he ſees good to carry on yet further by what he ſtill further exerciſeth you with.

2. 'Tis poſſible that by your unmeet and ſinful Carriage, and the ſtirrings and breaking forth of Corruption in your Afflictions, you may have given God juſt occaſion of bringing other Afflictions upon you. When being under God's Hand, he expects we ſhould be humbled and reformed, then many times we diſcover more of the Pride, Stubbornneſs and Incorrigibleneſs of our Hearts, than ever we did before. Thus it was with *Ephraim*, when God in order to his Humiliation and Reformation laid his Hand upon him; *When*

Hoſea 7. 1. *I would have healed* Iſrael, *then the Iniquity of* Ephraim *was diſcovered.*

3. Though God's Corrections had for the preſent put ſome little Stop to your Sins, yet it may be afterwards you quickly returned to them again. And if we return to Sin, we need not count it ſtrange that God ſhould return to afflict us.

4. Though

4. Though there ſhould be no new Provocation, yet God may afflict us again for Prevention. He ſees the ſecret Frame and Diſpoſition of your Heart. If there be but a Readineſs and Preparation of Heart to return to Sin again upon any Occaſion or Temptation offered; God who ſearcheth the Heart, diſcerneth this evil Frame thereof, and judgeth it neceſſary to ſtop the breaking forth thereof by ſome Affliction or other. To be ſure God never returns to chaſten, and renews his Witneſſes againſt us but when there is need; and therefore this we may certainly conclude, that whenſoever he takes the Rod again into his Hand, there is a Cauſe, whether we diſcern it or no. Wherefore if we muſt needs complain, let us complain againſt our ſelves: Let us complain of the deſperate Wickedneſs of our Hearts, and the Stubbornneſs of corrupt Nature, that calls for ſo many Blows. Let us complain of the Strength of Sin within us, that needs ſo many Afflictions to break the Power of it, and ſubdue it. Let us complain, that after we have ſuffered ſo much we ſhould ſtill be ſo bad; that ſo many Rods muſt be worn out upon

us, and yet we are little the better.

Object. 6. *But my Afflictions are such as I see not how they can ever do me any Good. If I saw any probable Grounds of Hope that they might prove beneficial to my Soul, and that I might be a Gainer by them in the end, then I think I could bear them more quietly. But when I can discern no Tendency that they have to my Good, how can I chuse but complain of my hard Lot, that I should be more grievously afflicted than many others, in such ways as from which no Advantage can redound unto me?*

Answ. 1. If it should so be as you apprehend, that no Benefit could accrue to you, or was ever intended you by your Afflictions; if God should lay his Hand on you merely because it pleaseth him so to deal with you; if he had no other end in afflicting you than only to use his Soveraignty and absolute Dominion over you; yet in that Case ought you quietly to submit. You are his Creature, the Work of his Hands, and
Prov. 16. 4. he made you for himself. For his *Plea-*
Rev. 4. 11. *sure you are and were created.* And having made you for himself, and for his own Pleasure, have you any reason to complain of Wrong done you, if he deal

deal with you as he pleaſeth? What are you that you ſhould think to be exempted from the common Condition of all Creatures, which is to be in Subjection to their Creator, and to be abſolutely at his Diſpoſal?

2. But yet this is not the Caſe; God is not wont to afflict us merely to exerciſe his Dominion over us. He chaſtens us for our Profit, that he may make us *Partakers of his Holineſs.* This we are ſure is his Deſign in his Chaſtiſements. And the Aſſurance which he hath given us hereof in the general, ſhould quiet us even when we cannot diſcover the particular end of his Corrections for the preſent, much leſs perceive wherein our Afflictions are advantageous to us. Heb. 12. 10

3. Whereas you ſay, you ſee not how you can receive any Benefit by your Afflictions; Why ſhould you make your ſelf wiſer than God? Doth not he much better underſtand what Courſe is fitteſt to do you good, than you do? Will you ſo diſparage his Wiſdom as to ſay, he takes a wrong Courſe; and that unleſs he ſhall think of dealing with you in another manner, you ſhall never be the better for his Chaſtiſements? If you grant that God is infinitely wiſe and

and good, you must believe that the Course which he takes with you is best, and shall not fail in the Issue to procure unto you all that Good which he intended you thereby.

4. What if it should so be that your Afflictions should already have done you much Good, though you discern it not? This is a thing that often is; we are in the dark, and the Benefit which we have received, and are still receiving by our Afflictions, is hid from our Eyes. Even they who most complain of the Fruitlesness of their Afflictions, yea that they are the worse for them rather than the better, do many times by their very Complaints discover the Benefit which by their Afflictions they have received. Their Complaints shew that since they have been afflicted, they have had a deeper Sense of the Power and Prevalency of Sin in themselves, and of the Hardness of their Hearts, and of the Obstinacy and Rebellion of their corrupt Nature. They had never so clear a Sight, or so lively a Sense of these things; neither did they ever so much take them to Heart, as since the Hand of God hath lain heavy on them. Now these are such evident and signal

Fruits

Fruits and Benefits of Affliction, as ought to be acknowledged with all Thankfulneſs.

5. So it is that oft-times it ſeems good to the moſt wiſe God for a while to conceal from us his Intentions in afflicting us, to the end that he may thereby make us the more ſolicitous about his meaning therein, and that he may quicken us to a more diligent Enquiry and Search after the Cauſe of our Afflictions; and that we may the more earneſtly and importunately ſeek unto him, and beg of him that he would be pleaſed to ſhew us why he contendeth with us, and lays his afflicting Hand on us; as alſo to help us to profit by our Afflictions. Wherefore if at any time we cannot diſcern God's End in afflicting us, much leſs ſee that we profit by our Afflictions, this ſhould awaken us, and affect us ſo much the more; this ſhould ſtir us up to make a more narrow Search after thoſe Sins by which we have incurred God's Diſpleaſure againſt us; it ſhould incite us to pray the more, that God would enable us to improve our Afflictions to thoſe Ends for which God lays them on us. This is the Uſe that we ſhould make of it, when

when we can neither perceive that our Afflictions do us any Good, nor underſtand why God afflicts us, and not preſently conclude that we ſhall never be the better for our Afflictions.

6. The chief Benefit to be attained by Afflictions is to be expected afterwards, rather than in the time of our lying under the Chaſtnings of God. So much the Apoſtle hath given us to underſtand, *Heb.* 12. 11. *No chaſtning for the preſent ſeemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheleſs afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable Fruit of Righteouſneſs to them that are exerciſed thereby.* Afflictions are ſpiritual Phyſick: Now Phyſick we know at preſent often diſcompoſeth and diſturbs Nature, and puts the whole Body out of Frame; it makes the Patient ſick before it cures him: And ſo it is with the Phyſick of the Soul; you cannot diſcern the Benefit of it till it hath done working: It makes you ſick for the preſent, but afterwards you come to ſee it was a good Sickneſs that made way for Health, and ended therein.

7. In the mean time, that you ſee not that you in ſome meaſure profit by your Afflictions, and that they are by degrees

degrees doing you good, is very much your own Fault.

(1.) You have a Prejudice againſt your Afflictions, you have an ill Opinion of thoſe Courſes which God takes with you for your Good; and this much hinders the kindly Operation of them upon you; as an ill Opinion of your Phyſician, or his Preſcriptions, hinders the working of your Phyſick, and deprives you of much of the Benefit thereof.

(2.) While you are under theſe Prejudices and perverſe Miſapprehenſions, you do not apply your ſelf to endeavour to profit by your Afflictions, improving God's Providences, and doing what in you lies to further the Succeſs of the Means which he applies and makes uſe of for the Cure of your Soul. While your Prejudices continue, and you are thereupon ſtill ſluggiſh and unactive, how can you expect to be ſenſible of the Benefit of your Afflictions? Caſt off your Prejudices, have good Thoughts of God's Methods of Cure; firmly believe that the Courſe which he takes with you is the beſt and fitteſt to do you good; ariſe, and be doing what you can towards the promoting of God's Deſign

Design in afflicting you; search your Heart, try your Ways, endeavour to get a Sight of your Sins, a true Hatred of them, serious and firm Resolutions to forsake them; renew these your Resolutions often, still endeavour to confirm and strengthen them more and more; and above all, be earnest and unceſſant in Prayer to God that he would be pleased to bless your Endeavours; and then say if you see any Cause of complaining, that your Afflictions are such as can never do you any Good.

The

The Ninth Sermon.

LAM. 3. 40.

Let us ſearch and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.

I Am now fallen upon the ſecond part of the Text, ſetting before us our Duty in time of Affliction; *Let us ſearch and try our VVays, and turn again to the Lord.*

The Duty is twofold: Firſt, That *we ſearch and try our VVays:* And ſecondly, That *we turn unto the Lord.*

The former of theſe Duties, as 'tis firſt in the Order of the Text, ſo 'tis in Nature. We muſt ſearch after our Sins, find them out and diſcover them, and then turn away from them. 'Tis impoſſible that we ſhould forſake them, until we have a ſight of them. He who ſees not his Sins, what ſhould he elſe do but ſtill go on boldly and fearleſly in the practice of them? What hath

hath he to hinder him or reduce him? I ſhall ſpeak ſomething of both theſe Duties; and firſt of that which hath the firſt place in the Text.

But before I come to ſpeak of the Duty it ſelf, of ſearching and trying our Ways in time of Affliction, in order to the finding out of thoſe our Sins, for which God hath laid his Hand upon us; I ſhall ſpeak a little in a more general way, of that which is near of kin unto the Duty of the Text; I mean, of Self-reflection, or a looking back upon our ſelves, and a reviewing and conſideration of our Thoughts, Words and Ways. And that which I ſhall ſay concerning it, ſhall be touching the Excellency and great Uſefulneſs thereof, and touching the Miſchiefs of the neglect of it.

I. As touching the Excellency of Self-reflection, or reviewing of our Thoughts, Words and Actions, I need ſay no more, than that 'tis a Perfection which only Men and Angels are capable of. All other Creatures, even thoſe of them which are moſt perfect in their Kind, and ſeem to have, as it were, ſome Shadow and Reſemblance of Reaſon in them; yet fall ſhort of this excellent

cellent Perfection. They cannot review what they have done, or take into consideration the Quality of their past Actions; they cannot reckon with themselves, and call themselves to an account of them: And indeed they need not do it, for they are under no other Rule or Law beside that of their Nature, and those natural Instincts which God hath put into them; by these they are ruled and swayed, and according to these they act: They are under the Command of no moral Law, and consequently their Actions are not capable of moral Good or Evil. But Man being under a moral Law, and accountable to his Creator for the Breaches thereof, for the better regulating and ordering of his Thoughts, Words and Actions, according to the Prescriptions of that Law, God hath endowed him with a Faculty of reviewing his Actions, and of considering them with relation to the Rule; to the end that where he finds he hath done well, he may be comforted and encouraged; and where he hath done ill, he may be humbled and reformed.

Thus hath he a Tribunal within his own Breast, before which he can, as often as he pleaseth, summon himself to

appear, demand an account of all that hath been done by himſelf whether good or evil. At this Tribunal he can judg and paſs Sentence, acquit or condemn himſelf according to the moral Nature and Quality of his Actions. Here he can rebuke and admoniſh as there ſhall be cauſe, recal and reduce himſelf where he hath gone aſtray, and lay ſtricter and ſeverer Charges and Injunctions on himſelf of greater Care and Watchfulneſs for the future, as in reſpect of his former Negligence and Remiſſneſs ſhall be neceſſary.

A moſt excellent and never-ſufficiently-admired Faculty of Man's Soul! What a rich Treaſure have we herein, if we knew how to value it and make uſe of it! But alas, how little Improvement do we make to our ſelves of this noble Faculty!

And this brings me to the ſecond thing, the great Uſefulneſs of Self-reflection. I have already, in what hath been ſpoken on the former Head, ſaid ſomething of the Uſefulneſs of it in general. I ſhall now deſcend to ſome Particulars, and ſpeak briefly to them.

1*ſt*. By reflecting on our ſelves, and taking a view of our paſt Actions, we come

come to know our ſelves: We underſtand the State and Condition of our Souls; what Caſe we are in, and what Opinion we ought to have of our ſelves. Hereby we come to be acquainted with our ſpiritual Concernments; whether we be in the State of Nature, or in the State of Grace; whether we be in the Way to Heaven, or in the Way to Hell. Hereby we come to know what our Declinings and Decays, what our Advances and Improvements in Grace are; whether we go forward or backward; whether it be better with us to day than 'twas yeſterday, and this Week than 'twas laſt Week, or worſe. Hereby we come to know the Sins that moſt prevail in us, and where our Weakneſs principally lies: Hereby we come to know our Wants and Defects, our Emptineſs and Poverty in ſpiritual Things. And of how great Concernment and Advantage is it to know our ſelves! And how little will it avail us to know much abroad, while we are Strangers at home! To underſtand the World, and to be thorowly converſant in all the Matters of it, perfectly acquainted with all the Affairs and Tranſactions thereof! To know all the Secrets of Nature, and

to have exactly dived into, and found out all the hidden Causes of Things! To have made such successful Inquiries into Divine Truths, as to be able to discourse of them to Admiration, and to give an account of all the profound and deep Mysteries of our Religion! What would all this signify, if after a Man hath attained to know all other things, he should be ignorant of himself? unacquainted with the spiritual Affairs of his own Soul, which he is infinitely more concerned to understand? Surely whatsoever else a Man hath attained to know, if he knows not himself, he knows nothing to any purpose. And he that knows himself as he ought to know, need not be much troubled at it though he know but little else.

2*dly*. By reflection on our selves we come to have the Comfort of our Estate, and of all our good Actions.

1. We hereby come to have the Comfort of our spiritual Estate. Tho we should be in the State of Grace and Salvation, in the Favour of God, and in the Way that will undoubtedly bring us to Heaven; yet if we know it not, how can we take Comfort in it? And how can we ever know it, without Reflection

flection on our ſelves, and a narrow Inſpection into our Hearts and Ways? Some doubtful Conjectures we may make, ſome dark Gueſſes there may be concerning our Eſtate; but we can never come to attain any certain Knowledg, any clear, diſtinct and well-grounded Satisfaction touching our Condition, without a ſerious Reflection on our Souls, and a due ſearch into, and conſideration of our Hearts and Ways.

And indeed this is one great Cauſe, among others, of the ſmall Comfort that many true Believers have in their Eſtate: They ſeldom reflect to any purpoſe on themſelves; they ſeldom take any pains by diligent ſearch and inquiry to ſatisfy themſelves touching their Condition. Hence it comes to paſs, that tho they be ſound for the main, tho they be in the right Way to Heaven, and are ſtill going on in it ſlowly and leiſurely; yet they are full of Fears, Doubtings and Diſſatisfactions; and if they have ſometimes a little Comfort in their Eſtate, yet they preſently loſe it again.

But now frequent and ſerious Reflections on themſelves, and an exact Inquiry into their Eſtate, and a reviewing of Matters as they ſtand within

them, and a taking an account of themſelves, how would it after ſome time by degrees ſo clear up their Condition to them, as all their Fears would be baniſhed, all the Cloudineſs and Darkneſs of their Minds would be ſcattered, and their Doubtings and Diſſatisfactions vaniſh! For we muſt take it for granted, that though there may be many great Weakneſſes in Believers, and frequent Relapſes into Sin; yet the conſtant Bent, unfeigned Deſires, and ſerious Endeavours of the Soul are in all things to pleaſe God.

Now whereſoever this is, (and indeed without this there is no true Grace) I ſay, whereſoever this is, a diligent and frequent Inquiry into our ſelves will diſcover it, and diſcover it ſo clearly, as a Man cannot but own it, and readily acknowledg, that amid many and great Weakneſſes, there hath been all along ſome ſincere and unfeigned Deſire and Endeavour to pleaſe God in all things. Whence we may conclude, that as it cannot eaſily be, but that a ſound and ſincere Chriſtian, who makes frequent Reflections on, and Inquiries into himſelf, ſhould evidently diſcern his own Sincerity; ſo having diſcerned it,

it, he cannot but have Comfort in it, at leaſt according to the meaſure of the clearneſs of his diſcovery of it. Wherefore I ſay it again, one great Cauſe why many true Believers have ſo little Comfort in their Eſtates, is this, That they ſo ſeldom have any ſerious Reflections on themſelves, or apply themſelves to make a diligent Inquiry into their Eſtate. This, this is a great Reaſon why they walk ſo heavily and uncomfortably, why they are ſo often overwhelmed with Fears and Perplexities, why inſtead of continual Thankſgivings unto God for his rich Grace and unſpeakable Mercy vouchſafed them, their Mouths are full of Complaints, and their Diſcourſes made up of little elſe than ſad diſcoveries of their inward Troubles and Diſſatisfactions, and the Conflicts they continually have with Doubting and Unbelief. How much ſound Comforts and Refreſhings do we loſe by being ſuch Strangers at home? What Peace and Joy in believing! what increaſes of Faith, and further degrees of Eſtabliſhment might we attain, if we were better acquainted with, and more converſant in this Self-reflection?

2. We hereby come to have the Comfort of all our good Actions. There is an inward Peace, Joy, Content and Satisfaction which uſually attends ſincere Obedience, notwithſtanding the Infirmities accompanying us in the Performance thereof, and the manifold Imperfections of it: But much of this Comfort is loſt for want of looking back and reviewing what we have done, and in what manner; with what ſincere Deſires to be accepted with God therein; with what Senſe of and mourning over the Corruption cleaving to our beſt Actions, though we cannot be rid of it: With what Watchfulneſs and Oppoſition made againſt the Sin that dwelleth in us, which would interpoſe and mingle it ſelf with every good thing we take in hand, with every Duty we perform. Theſe things more or leſs are to be found, and may be obſerved in every ſound Chriſtian: and Matter of very great Comfort they are to him who can diſcover them in himſelf. But alas! neglecting to review our Actions, when they are over, inſtead of the Comforts we might have in ways of Obedience, too often nothing but Trouble and inward Regret follows.

lows. When we have done our beſt, we queſtion our Sincerity in all that we have done, for the Workings of our corrupt Nature, and the ſinful Imperfections of our Services come to our Remembrance, and are freſh in our Memories; but the Oppoſition we made againſt them is either hid from our Eyes, or forgotten: And all this for want of a ſerious Reflection on what hath paſt, and a careful reviewing of our Actions, together with the manner of them, and all their concomitant Circumſtances. As reflecting on our Ways and reviewing our Actions, we never want Matter of Humiliation; ſo the upright and ſound Chriſtian never wants Matter of Comfort alſo in the Sincerity of his Heart. Theſe two go together, and very well agree; a ſight and ſenſe of our Failings, with true Humiliation for them, and Comfort in the Uprightneſs of our Hearts amidſt thoſe Failings. The Truth is, theſe two are ſo far from being inconſiſtent, that we never have ſounder Comfort in our Obedience, than when we moſt clearly diſcern and moſt heartily bewail our Failings. To ſee and mourn over our Defects, and yet even then to believe

lieve that God accepts of our weak but ſincere Endeavours, through Chriſt: how doth this fill our Hearts not only with Joy, but humble Admiration, that God ſhould have ſuch Reſpect unto, and ſo kindly accept of ſuch poor and worthleſs Services as we preſent him with, and that notwithſtanding all the Stains and Blemiſhes that are upon them, for which he might moſt juſtly loath both us and them.

3. By Reflection on our ſelves we come to diſcover our Sins, and have a Sight of the Errors and Miſcarriages of our Life. He who never reviews his Actions, nor conſiders what he hath done, how many Sins may he cheriſh, how many Abominations may he take Pleaſure in, what Filthineſs and Pollutions may he even wallow in, and take no notice of them, much leſs lay them to Heart? How quietly may he ſleep in thoſe Sins which without timely and ſound Repentance will inevitably ruine him? How confidently and fool-hardily may ſuch an one be haſtning on in the way that leads to Deſtruction, and never come to have his Eyes open to diſcern his fearful Condition till he find himſelf to be in Hell? But now Reflection

flection on our Hearts and Ways being a Means of opening our Eyes, and of bringing us to the Knowledg of our Sins, is attended with three unvaluable Benefits.

(1.) It quickens us to the Uſe of Means for obtaining the Pardon of thoſe Sins, which without Pardon obtained, would eternally condemn us.

(2.) It's a Means of keeping off many temporal Evils which thoſe Sins unrepented of might bring upon us in this World, or of mitigating thoſe Afflictions which light upon us for them: For when we are ſoundly humbled for our Sins, and have obtained the Pardon of them, either God forbears to chaſten us for them, according to that of the Apoſtle; *If we would judg our ſelves, we ſhould not be judged of the Lord:* or the Sting of thoſe his Chaſtiſements being pluck'd out by Repentance, and Forgiveneſs obtained, they are much leſs bitter and grievous unto us; and we bear them more quietly and comfortably. 1 Cor. 11. 31.

(3.) It prevents our running on in thoſe Sins, and our heaping up ſtill more and more Guilt upon our own Heads.

(4.) He

(4.) He that inureth himſelf to this Courſe of reflecting on himſelf, and communing with his own Heart daily, ſhall never want either good Company, or comfortable Employment.

1*ſt*. He ſhall never want good Company. In his moſt ſecret Retirements and greateſt Solitarineſs, he will be good Company for himſelf. What *Solomon* ſaith of the Commandments of God; *When thou goeſt, they ſhall lead thee; when thou ſleepeſt, they ſhall keep thee; and when thou awakeſt, they ſhall talk with thee.* That may be ſaid of a Man who is much in reflecting upon himſelf, and communing with his own Heart; when he walks, he is a Companion to himſelf; when he lies him down to take his Reſt, he ſleeps with himſelf, he is his own Bed-fellow, he needs no other Company; and when he awakes, he talks with himſelf. If all others ſhould withdraw and eſtrange themſelves from him, yet he would not much complain as long as he hath ſuch good Company within his own Breaſt. *A good Man*, ſaith *Solomon*, *ſhall be ſatisfied from himſelf.* He never enjoys himſelf better than while he is at home, and converſant with himſelf. 'Tis not ſo with wicked Men, they

Prov. 6. 22

Prov. 14. 14.

they hate to be at home, they cannot endure to be acquainted with themſelves, they ſhun their own Company; the Conſcience they have of their own Guilt, makes them afraid to look into their own Hearts. They run away from themſelves as they would from an Enemy.

2dly. He never wants comfortable Imployment: He could find Work enough within himſelf, though he had nothing to do abroad: He could with greateſt Content and Satisfaction take up and entertain himſelf in communing with his own Heart; he is not afraid to look inward, or to know too much of himſelf: 'tis not an unpleaſing and irkſom thing to him to examine himſelf, and to take an Account of his own Actions; he is uſed to theſe things, and his Soul looks for them; and without them it can no more enjoy it ſelf than a Man can live comfortably without the daily Recruits of Strength and Spirits, by moderate Sleep and wholſom Diet. If through any Avocation or Divertiſement he be a Stranger to himſelf for a little time, he is as a Fiſh out of its proper Element. And that which will not eaſily be believed by thoſe who have

have little Acquaintance with theſe things, even thoſe Parts of this Work which ſeem to be moſt unacceptable, moſt troubleſom and grievous, are pleaſant and delightful to him. He is glad not only when he can diſcern and read his Evidences of true Grace and Sincerity, but when by Search into himſelf he can find out the ſecret Hypocriſies that lurk in his Heart; when he can make Diſcovery of any Sin within him, which before he took no notice of. A Man would not have a Moth in his Clothes, or a Thief in his Family, if he could chuſe; but if they be there, he is glad when he finds them out, that he may be rid of them. So he that truly hates Sin, is glad when he can make Diſcovery of it in himſelf, that he may ſet himſelf againſt it, and ſubdue it, though indeed he ſhould be more glad if it were not there to be diſcovered.

II. I come now to the Miſchiefs of the Neglect of Self-reflection, and they are many and great; I ſhall mention ſome of them.

1. It is a Cauſe of hardning the Heart. There is ſcarce any thing that more

more conduceth to the keeping of the Heart ſoft and tender, than a frequent reviewing of our Actions, and calling our ſelves to an Account of what we have done. He who conſtantly obſerves this Courſe, who looks back and conſiders his Ways, reviews his Thoughts, Words and Actions, and reckons with himſelf for them daily, ſhall find that he is both more afraid of yielding to Temptations, and venturing upon Sin when it preſents it ſelf, and more troubled after the commiſſion thereof: He can neither be ſo eaſily prevailed with to give way to Sin, nor be ſo quiet, ſo ſenſleſs and ſecure after he hath given way to it, or been overtaken with it: He uſually cloſeth not with Sin freely and readily, but with ſome Reluctancy, and after ſome inward Conflicts with himſelf, and Reſiſtance made againſt it: and having been worſted in the Conflict, and overcome, his awakened Conſcience gives him no Reſt until he hath been humbled for his Sin, and made his Peace with God. But he who ſeldom or never reflects on himſelf, or takes any account of his Ways, gives his Conſent to the commiſſion of Sin freely and readily,

readily, yea ſwallows it down greedily; and having ſo done, he alſo ſleeps in it as ſoundly and ſecurely for the moſt part: No Remorſe, no inward Trouble takes hold of him to quicken him to Repentance, and haſten his Return to God. Thus I mean ordinarily it is with him, unleſs where ſome horrid Guilt awakens his Conſcience, or God makes extraordinary Impreſſions of his Wrath upon the Soul.

2. Another Miſchief of neglecting to reflect on our ſelves, is a daily Increaſe of Sin, and a treaſuring up of Wrath againſt the Day of Wrath. This is an unavoidable Conſequent of the former Miſchief. When the Heart is once hardned, and a Brawnineſs grown over the Conſcience, what ſhould put a Stop to Sin? What ſhould hold in corrupt Nature, or ſet any Bounds to the impetuous Workings, to the Exceſſes and Extravagancies of it? To an hardned Heart and a ſeared Conſcience, neither the Evil of Sin in it ſelf conſidered, nor the Danger and diſmal Conſequents of it, nor the Threatnings of God, nor the Examples of his terrible Judgments upon others for Sin, will ſignify any thing. The Hardneſs of a Man's Heart,

and

and the brawny Inſenſibleneſs of his Conſcience, are as Armour of Proof againſt all theſe things. This woful Conſequent of not reflecting on our ſelves, and requiring an Account of our Actions, we may gather from the Prophets Complaint concerning the obſtinate and incorrigible Jews of his time: *No Man repented him of his Wickedneſs, ſaying, What have I done? Every one turned to his Courſe, as the Horſe ruſheth into the Battel.* That Men ran on ſo deſperately upon Sin, was becauſe no Man ſaid, *What have I done?* None reflected, called himſelf to an Account of his Doings, or took into ſerious Conſideration the woful Iſſues and Conſequents of his ſinful Courſes. Jer. 8. 6.

3. Another Miſchief hereof is, that the longer any Man neglects to look into his ſpiritual Eſtate, and conſider his Doings, the more unwilling ſtill he will be to reckon with himſelf. 'Tis with the Sinner in this Caſe as 'tis with a careleſs Merchant, who hath long neglected to ſum up his Books, and to enquire in what Condition he is, whether he goes forward or backward in his Eſtate, whether he be a Loſer or a Gainer by his Trading. If he hath

long gone on in this careleſs way, and eſpecially if he hath withal been laviſh and prodigal in his Expences, he will be very unwilling to acquaint himſelf with the true State of his Accounts. He is afraid he ſhall find himſelf in a bad Condition, and therefore he ſtill goes on in his old careleſs way. So the longer the Sinner hath neglected to reckon with himſelf, the more unwelcome to him are the Thoughts of coming to an Account: His Conſcience tells him he hath run far in Arrears with God, and therefore he ſhuns the Thoughts of looking over his Debts.

4. And yet without coming to a Reckoning, which is a further Miſchief, and the greateſt of all, he can never hope to have his Debts cancell'd or remitted. The Pardon of his many and grievous Sins will never be obtained, unleſs he judg himſelf for them, unleſs he be truly humbled for them, and forſake them. There is no Promiſe of Forgiveneſs upon any other Terms. But how far is he from this, who cannot endure to think of taking a View of his Sins, who hates the Knowledg of his Sins, and carefully ſhuns and avoids whatever might bring him

to

to the Sight of them? Never dream of obtaining the Forgiveneſs of your Sins as long as 'tis thus with you. And if your Sins be not forgiven you, everlaſting Miſery will be your Portion, and it had been better for you if you had never been born.

To apply this briefly.

All you then who could never yet be perſwaded to ſpend any Time, or take any Pains in looking into your ſelves, and reviewing your Actions, and the various Paſſages of your Life, what is it that makes you ſo unwilling to be acquainted with your ſelves, and ſo carefully to decline whatſoever might bring you to a right Underſtanding of the Eſtate of your Souls? Are you therefore better, becauſe you do not know how bad you are? Is either your Sin or your Danger the leſs, becauſe you do not ſee it? Is it any Security to you againſt the Judgments of God, that you turn away your Eyes from your Sins, and will not look upon them? If you were running on upon a Precipice, or a ſteep Place where you might break your Neck, would the blindfolding of your ſelf, or the ſhutting of your Eyes preſerve you? Would not your Danger be

the ſame whether you ſee it or no? Is not your Danger ſo much the greater, and your Deſtruction, if you ſtill go on, ſo much the more certain and inevitable, becauſe you wilfully cloſe your Eyes, that you may not be ſenſible of it? Remember your ſelves, and conſider in what Rank God hath placed you. You are rational Creatures; Why then ſhould you act ſo irrationally? God hath made you Men; Why ſhould you make your ſelves like the Beaſts that periſh?

To take you off from this Folly, or rather Madneſs, I ſhall recommend only two things to your ſerious Conſideration; and they are theſe.

1. God hath given you that excellent Faculty of Self-reflection, whereof I have been diſcourſing, that looking in upon your ſelves, and making diſcovery of your Sin and Danger, you might prevent your Ruine. Now if you wilfully refuſe to make uſe of it, and on purpoſe either ſhut your Eyes, or turn them another way that you may not ſee your ſelf, nor diſcover your Sin and Danger, how juſt will your Ruine be, and to whom can you impute the cauſe of your Deſtruction but to your ſelves, who

who would wilfully run upon it? This may, perhaps, ſeem to have but little in it now; but time will come when it ſhall be an Heart-piercing Conſideration, that you ſhould have procured all your Miſery to your ſelf, by obſtinately refuſing to make uſe of that Faculty of your Soul beſtowed upon you on purpoſe, that reviewing your Sins, you might be ſenſible of the Miſery that attends them, and uſe Means to eſcape it. We read of the Oſtrich, that ſhe *leaveth her Eggs in the Earth, and warmeth them in the Duſt; and forgetteth that the Foot may cruſh them, or that the wild Beaſt may break them; becauſe God hath deprived her of Wiſdom, neither hath he imparted to her Underſtanding.* God hath not endued her with a Faculty of foreſeeing and providing againſt Danger. But it cannot be ſaid of you, that God has not imparted to you Underſtanding; he hath given you Reaſon and Underſtanding enough to uſe Means for providing againſt your own Deſtruction, but however you will run headlong upon it. Job 39.14, 15, 17.

2. How averſe ſoever you be now from reflecting on your ſelf, hereafter you muſt reflect whether you will or

no: Though you do what you can to close your Eyes for the present, yet the time is coming when you shall be enforced to open them. When God awakens your Conscience, and sets all your Sins in order before you, then it will not be in your Power to refuse, to reflect; then you will not be able to seek it your self: your horrid Guilt and hideous Provocations, whithersoever you look, will still be full in your Eyes. This will certainly be either in this World, or in that which is to come: And O with what Horror and Consternation of Spirit will that Reflection be! *David*'s Condition was sad, when he
Psal. 51. 3. complained that his *Sin was ever before him.* His Thoughts were always upon it; it was continually in his Eye, and he could not be rid of it. What think you then of the Damned in Hell! How fearful will their Condition be, when all their Sins shall be laid before them, and be represented to them in their full Magnitude, and with all their Aggravations: and when their Minds shall be so intent upon them, and their Thoughts so continually taken up with them, as that there shall be no Intermission or Diversion for ever to give the least

leaſt Mitigation of their Torments? When thoſe dreadful and unceſſant Reflections ſhall be, what would a Man then give to purchaſe a few Hours for Self-humbling and penitential Reflection in order to the attaining of Forgiveneſs? If you have any ſenſe of your Eternal Concernments, be perſwaded to reflect now, and to do it ſeriouſly, that you may never have experience of the Horror and Dreadfulneſs of thoſe After-reflections in another World.

And thus much of Self-reflection in the general. I now come to ſpeak of it with relation to the time of Affliction; for to that Seaſon hath the Exhortation in the Text reference, *Let us ſearch and try our Ways.* Theſe two words, *ſearch* and *try*, import the ſame thing; and the Prophet uſeth two words to the ſame purpoſe, to note with what Diligence and Induſtry we muſt ſearch, as I have before, in the Explication of the Words, obſerved. 'Tis indeed a diligent Search that each of the Words, taken ſeverally, imports, and much more being joined together.

Which Diligence is in this Work requiſite, and neceſſary in ſeveral reſpects;

and there is great reaſon why we ſhould be urged to it.

1. 'Tis a Buſineſs we have no great mind to meddle with. 'Tis no eaſy matter to draw us on and engage us to ſet upon this Work of ſearching into our Hearts and Ways; we could more willingly be doing any thing elſe: And when we ſet about it, we are very apt to do it ſlightly and careleſly. For proof hereof, I need do no more than appeal to every Man's Conſcience. How many are there who are ſo averſe from it, that they could never yet be gotten to ſet about it? And as for others, that are not wholly Strangers to it, yet how ſeldom is it done by them, and how overly and ſlackly for the moſt part! Yea, though Affliction be the proper Seaſon for it, and though then we are more concern'd to do it, and our preſent Exigences ſhould put us upon it; yet even then how often is it neglected, when no other Means from whence we think we may expect any Relief, are omitted?

2. Many of our Sins are not eaſily diſcerned; and therefore unleſs we ſearch diligently, we are not likely to find them. There are divers Grounds of

of the difficulty of finding out our Sins.

(1.) Our Ignorance in many things, and the falſe Notions and Principles concerning Good and Evil, which we have taken up and entertained. We are ſubject to many Miſtakes, and are apt to call Evil Good, and Good Evil; to *put Darkneſs for Light, and Light for Darkneſs*, as the Prophet ſpeaks, *Iſa.* 5. 20. And the Principles and Opinions which have once gotten poſſeſſion of us, are not eaſily relinquiſhed or quitted, how unſound ſoever. From the Influence and Force of ſuch falſe Principles and Miſpriſions, 'tis that many live and die in ſome Sins, never coming to the ſight of them: For if at any time they would look into their Eſtate, and ſearch out their Sins, theſe their falſe Principles caſt a Miſt before their Eyes, and hinder them from making diſcovery of them. Though there may be ſome true deſire to find out their Sins, yet as long as their Errors and Miſtakes remain with them, they ſearch after them in vain.

(2.) The natural Self-love that is in every Man, is another thing that makes it difficult to find out our Sins. We are partial to our ſelves, and ſo favourable

rable and indulgent in our own Caſe, that we are not competent Judges. Self-love blinds us, and makes us willing to overlook thoſe Evils in our ſelves, which it may be we ſhould not only obſerve, but ſeverely cenſure in others.

(3.) Our Affection to Sin, and the Kindneſs we have for it, doth alſo increaſe the difficulty of finding it out. We love our Sins, and are unwilling to part with them; and this makes us unwilling to diſcover them. So though we ſearch after them, yet 'tis but as an Officer ſearcheth after an Offender that is his Friend, or for whom he hath ſome Favour: He ſearcheth for him indeed, but as one who would not willingly light on him whom he ſearcheth for: He makes a diligent and narrow ſearch where he knows he is not; but if he come near any place where he ſuſpects he may lie hid, he is careful not to ſearch that Place too narrowly. Much after this manner do we ſearch after our Sins, eſpecially our beloved Sins, which in regard of the intire Affection we bear them, we would ſtill retain, whatever other Sins we part with.

(4.) Another Reaſon of the difficulty of diſcovering our Sins, is the Deceitfulneſs

ceitfulneſs of Sin. Sin diſguiſeth it ſelf, and puts on the Dreſſes and Habit of ſome other thing, that it may not be known. As Cheaters that wander up and down from Place to Place, ſhift their Clothes, and call themſelves by other Names, that they may not be diſcovered; ſo doth Sin often ſo dreſs it ſelf up, as it counterfeits ſome Grace, and Vice calls it ſelf by the Name of ſome Vertue. A ſtrong Fancy, which is no better than Self-deluſion, may be miſtaken for true Faith; Lukewarmneſs and ſinful Compliance may have the Appearance of Moderation and Chriſtian Prudence; Stupidity and Unſenſibleneſs under the Hand of God may paſs for Patience; and the voluntary Hardſhips of Monkiſh Severities may be dreſſed up like Repentance, though they never reach the Change of the Heart and inner Man, in which true Repentance chiefly conſiſts. And how often do Paſſion, Bitterneſs and Evil-ſpeaking, put on the Attire and Diſguiſe of Zeal! Many more ſuch Inſtances might be given of Sin appearing in ſuch Colours, and hiding it ſelf under ſuch Dreſſes, as it deceives not only others, but even the Sinner himſelf.

Where-

Wherefore though in a Man's ſearch into himſelf, he ſhould meet his Sin full but, as they ſay; yet meeting it ſo diſguiſed, he takes no notice of it, but lets it paſs, as a Man doth the Malefactor he is looking after, when he finds him not in that Apparel by which he was deſcribed. In all theſe Reſpects a diligent and narrow Search is neceſſary, if we be in earneſt and truly deſirous to find out our Sins.

From what hath been ſpoken touching the difficulty of diſcovering our Sins, we may infer,

1. That ſome convenient Time muſt be ſet apart for this Work, when a Man may wholly apply himſelf thereunto, and when he may have nothing to diſtract or hinder him. If a Man will find out his Sins, he muſt ſearch narrowly and carefully, as hath been ſaid; he muſt look into every Corner of his Heart, he muſt ſurvey and conſider all his Ways, his Thoughts, Words and Actions; how he hath carried himſelf in his general or particular Calling; how he hath diſcharged every Truſt; how he hath performed the Duties of every Relation in which he ſtands. Such a thorow Search as this will not eaſily

eaſily be made; a few ſlight Thoughts or overly Reflections on himſelf while he is in a Croud of Buſineſſes, while his Heart and Head are full of the World, will do little towards the diſcovery of all his Sins, many of which do not appear in open view, but ſo withdraw and hide themſelves, as it will coſt a Man ſome time and pains to get a ſight of them.

2. That he who would ſo ſearch after his Sins as to find them, muſt get his Heart affected with a true hatred of Sin, and a ſincere willingneſs to forſake it. For though Sin muſt be found out before it can be forſaken, yet a Man muſt be willing to forſake it before he can readily find it out. The reaſon is, becauſe ſo long as a Man is unwilling to leave his Sin, he will be unwilling to find it, and ſo will never ſeek narrowly and ſtrictly after it. When once we are fully convinc'd of the Evil and Danger of Sin; when once we hate it unfeignedly, and are reſolved to do our utmoſt to be rid of it, then ſhall we ſearch after it with a Mind to find it; then ſhall we make the moſt diligent and impartial Inquiry into our ſelves, that it may not eſcape our Eye.

3. We

3. We may also further infer, that when we address our selves to this Work, we must be suspicious and jealous of our selves. We are too willing to favour our selves, and to indulge our selves in some particular Sins which have gotten an Interest in our Affections; and we are furnished with many Colours and Artifices to cover them over, and hide the Evil of them from our Eyes. 'Tis therefore safe and needful that we should suspect our false and deceitful Hearts, and preserve a continual Jealousy of our selves, lest we should be too favourable and kind to those Sins which lie nearest our Hearts, whether they be profitable or pleasurable Sins, or of what other Nature or Quality soever.

4. We may likewise hence be informed how much it concerns us to implore God's Assistance in this Business; that while we apply our selves to search and try our ways, he would be pleased to search and try us, as *David*'s Prayer was, *Psal.* 139. 23. that he would discover our Sins to us, and give us a Sight of them; that he would help us against the Deceitfulness of our Hearts, and against our Self-love; that he would enable

able us to search so narrowly and impartially as we may not overlook our Sins: and more especially, that he would be pleased to discover to us those particular Sins for which he doth afflict us. Without this our Recourse to God in Prayer, and his Assistance obtained, all our searching will be to little purpose.

Now in the next Place, the time of Affliction is a proper Season for this Duty. For,

1. Then God by his Chastisements doth as it were summon us to reflect and enquire after the Cause within our selves. *The Rod of God* hath a Voice, Micah 6.9. and it calls upon us for this Duty. Every Providence of God hath its proper Language, by which it remembers us of something that is expected from us; Mercies call for Joy and Thankfulness, and Afflictions for Reflection and Consideration: *In the Day of Prosperity be joyful, but in the Day of Adversity consider.* Eccl. 7.14. We must then consider what God's Meaning and Intentions may be in laying such Afflictions on us, and what those our Sins may be for which he so corrects us.

2. 'Tis

2. 'Tis then ſeaſonable to ſearch and try our Ways, becauſe that is the readieſt and moſt effectual Courſe we can take for obtaining the Removal of our Afflictions; I mean, if we ſearch and try our ways, in order to the finding out of our Sins, that we may forſake them, and accordingly forſake them when we have found them out: For the end of God's Chaſtiſements being the taking away of our Sins, *Iſa.* 27. 9. and the cleanſing and purifying of us from the Defilements thereof, *Dan.* 12. 10. When God hath his End, we being turned from our evil Ways, he hath by many Promiſes aſſured us, that he will be at Peace with us. So *Jer.* 3. 12. *Return O backſliding* Iſrael, *ſaith the Lord, and I will not cauſe mine Anger to fall upon you. When thou art in Tribulation, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and ſhall be obedient to his Voice, he will not forſake thee, neither deſtroy thee,* Deut. 4. 30, 31. *Let the Wicked forſake his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have Mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon,* Iſa. 55. 7. Neither particular Perſons only, but even whole Nations

ons returning to the Lord, find Mercy with him for the averting or removing of his Judgments: *At what Inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to deſtroy it; If that Nation againſt whom I have pronounced, turn from their Evil, I will repent me of the Evil that I thought to do unto them.* Jer. 18. 7, 8. Hereupon the People of God ſorely ſmitten and wounded, are encouraged to return to him, in Confidence of Healing if they return: *Come let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath ſmitten, and he will bind us up.* Hoſea 6. 1. How ſad and deplorable ſoever their preſent Condition were, they made no queſtion but all their Wounds ſhould be healed, and all their Breaches ſhould be made up, if they returned to God. But now what muſt lay the Foundation of their Return? or what muſt be the firſt ſtep towards it, but a diligent Search after their Sins, by which they had departed from him? The Neglect hereof is that which continues and prolongs our Afflictions, whatever other Means we make uſe of to relieve our ſelves thereby. But of this more hereafter, when I come to

ſpeak of the ſecond Duty in time of Affliction.

3. In time of Affliction we have ſome ſpecial Advantage towards the ſearching after and finding out of our Sins, which at other times we are deſtitute of.

1ſt. Afflictions abate the Vanity and Lightneſs of our Spirits, and make us ſerious, and ſo more fit to reflect on our ſelves, and conſider our Ways. At other times our Minds will not be ſo eaſily fix'd, and our Thoughts held in and kept cloſe, to a Work which is not very pleaſing to us, and which we are apt to recoil from.

2*dly*. Affliction makes our Hearts ſoft, as *Job* ſpeaks; it makes Impreſſions of God's Diſpleaſure upon our Hearts, and makes us ſenſible of his Anger. When God ſeveral ways lays his Hand upon you, then you ſay with them, *Deut.* 31. 17. *Are not theſe things come upon us, becauſe God is not among ſt us?* Becauſe he in Diſpleaſure hath withdrawn from us?

3*dly*. Affliction makes us teachable, and willing to be informed of what is amiſs; it makes us deſirous to underſtand what 'tis for which God hath a Con-

Controverſy with us. God ſpeaks to Men in their Proſperity, and they will not hear, as he complained, *Jer.* 22. 21. But Affliction, as God ſanctifies it to them, makes them willing to hear and learn wherein they have offended. Then they beg of God that he would teach them, as *Job* did in his Affliction, ſaying, *Make me to know my Tranſgreſſion, and my Sin*, chap. 13. 23. *Then God ſhews them their Work and their Tranſgreſſions that they have exceeded, and openeth their Ear to Diſcipline*, ch. 36. 9, 10.

4*thly*. God in his Wiſdom oft-times makes choice of ſuch Afflictions to correct Men with, by which he, as it were, points at their Sin. When *Abſolom* and *Adonijah*, both of them their Father's Darlings, roſe up againſt their Father, it was no hard Matter for *David* to diſcern what Sin of his God thereby intended to correct. He too fondly treated both the one and the other, and uſed much more Lenity and Indulgence towards them than was meet; and by God's wiſe and juſt Permiſſion they requite him accordingly. This his Miſcarriage *David* could not ſo well ſee before; for inordinate Affection and fond Love are blind; but

now no doubt he ſaw and was made ſenſible of his Error in the Education of his Children. That God's Judgments and Chaſtiſements are often ſuch as the Sin which he puniſheth or correcteth for, may be known by them, is moſt agreeable both unto Scriptures and Experience. How frequently may we obſerve, that ſuch Children as have been ſtubborn and undutiful to their Parents, have afterwards been puniſhed themſelves with undutiful and rebellious Children: that falſe and unfaithful Servants have met with ſuch themſelves, when afterwards they have had Families of their own: that unthankful Perſons have met with as ill Requitals from thoſe who have received Kindneſſes from them: that falſe and treacherous Friends have been betrayed by thoſe on whoſe Friendſhip and Faithfulneſs they moſt depended? It ſeems good to the Wiſdom of God ſo to order and diſpoſe of the Circumſtances of his Judgments or Chaſtiſements, that either the Time, or the Place, or the Inſtrument, or the Manner, or the Matter and Object of them, have often ſome Correſpondence with, and Relation to the Sin which he chiefly aims at.

(1.) God

(1.) God ſometimes points out Mens Sin by the time he takes to puniſh them. A Man hath, it may be, often offended in the ſame kind; and God hath for the moſt part ſtill diſcovered his Diſpleaſure more or leſs, by ſomewhat that the Sinner hath met with, or hath befallen him, either at or preſently upon the renewed commiſſion of that Sin. At length he offends in the ſame kind more notoriouſly; and immediately thereupon ſome more ſevere Stroke lights upon him from the Hand of God, than ever at any time before. When thus it is, what other Conſtruction can a Man make of God's dealing with him, but that he is chaſtned for ſuch a Sin? And as for Chaſtiſements, ſo for the Judgments of God, they often light on Men either in the Act, or preſently upon the commiſſion of their Sins. When *Nebuchadnezzar* was ſaying in the Pride of his Heart, *Is not this great* Babylon *which I have built for the Houſe of my Kingdom, and by the Might of my Power, and for the Honour of my Majeſty? While the Word was yet in the King's Mouth, there fell a Voice from Heaven, ſaying, O King* Nebuchadnezzar, *to thee it is ſpoken, The Kingdom is departed from* Dan. 4.30, 31,32,33.

thee: They shall drive thee from Men, and thy Dwelling shall be with the Beasts of the Field, and they shall make thee eat Grass as Oxen. And the same Hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar. So afterwards when *Belshazzar* was profanely carouzing and drinking Wine in the Golden Vessels of the Temple, and *praising his Gods of Gold and Silver, of Brass and of Iron, and of Wood and of Stone: In the same Hour came forth Fingers of a Man's Hand, and wrote upon the Plaister of the Wall* that Judgment which God had decreed should light upon the King; and which accordingly that same Night was put in Execution. And thus *Herod*, as soon as he had finished his Oration, and received the Applauses of the People, crying out, *It is the Voice of a God, and not of a Man: Immediately the Angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the Glory: and he was eaten of Worms, and gave up the Ghost.*

Dan. 5. 3, 4, 5, 30.

Acts 12. 21, 22, 23.

(2.) Sometimes the Judgments or Chastisements of God light upon Men in the very Place where they formerly had offended. So God threatned to requite *Ahab* in that Plat, in that very Plat of Ground where he had sinned.

2 Kings 9. 26.

So

So whereas the Iſraelites had highly provoked God to Anger, by building high Places in *Tophet* for their Idolatrous Worſhip, and by burning their Sons and their Daughters in the Fire there; God threatned there to puniſh them for their Idolatry and Cruelty: Thus ſaith the Lord, *The Days come that it ſhall no more be called* Tophet, *or the Valley of the Son of* Hinnom, *but the Valley of Slaughter: for they ſhall bury in* Tophet, *till there be no Place: and the Carcaſes of the People ſhall be Meat for the Fowls of the Heaven, and for the Beaſts of the Earth, and none ſhall fray them away.* Jer. 7. 31, 32, 33.

(3.) The Inſtruments by which God puniſheth Men, are ſometimes the ſame which were the Inſtruments of their Sin. Thus the *Sichemites* whom *Abimelech* made uſe of as his Inſtruments and Aſſiſtants in ſlaying his Brethren, were afterwards through God's righteous Judgment a Means of the Deſtruction of *Abimelech* himſelf. Judg. 7.

(4.) God often puniſheth Men in ſuch a manner as bears ſome Reſemblance with their Sin. The Scripture is full of Inſtances hereof. If *Jacob* deceive his aged Father, and make him

believe he is his eldeſt Son *Eſau*, and ſo ſteal away the Bleſſing from his Bro-
Gen. 29. 23 ther, *Laban* ſhall deceive him much in the like manner, giving him *Leah* to Wife inſtead of *Rachel*. If *David* firſt
2 Sam. 12. commit Adultery with *Bathſhebah*, and
10, 11, 12. then contrive the murdering of *Uriah* for the concealing thereof, his Son *Abſolom* ſhall be permitted to lie with his Father's Concubines, as he had done with the Wife of *Uriah*; and as he had ſlain *Uriah* by the Sword of the Children of *Ammon*, ſo the Sword ſhall never depart from his Houſe. If *Ahab* and *Jezebel* take away the Life of *Naboth*, becauſe he would not part with his Vineyard, and the Dogs do lick his Blood; the Sentence of *Ahab* from the Mouth of the Lord ſhall be, *In the Place where Dogs licked the Blood of* Naboth, *ſhall Dogs lick thy Blood, even thine*, 1 Kings 21. 19. And *the Dogs ſhall eat* Jezebel *by the VVall of* Jezreel: and *him that dieth of* Ahab *in the City, Dogs ſhall eat: and him that dieth in the Field ſhall the Fowls of the Air eat*, ver. 23, 24. If *Nadab* and *A-*
Levit. 10. 1, 2. *bihu*; If the two hundred and fifty Men
Numb. 16. 35. which were the Complices of *Corah*, *Dathan* and *Abyram*, preſume to offer

ſtrange

ſtrange Fire before the Lord; by ſtrange Fire, *by a Fire coming out from before the Lord ſhall they be conſumed.* If the Iſraelites burn Incenſe to the Queen of Heaven upon the Tops of their Houſes, their Houſes ſhall be ſet on fire, and burnt down by the Enemy. As the Sword of *Agag* the King of the *Amalekites* had made many Women childleſs, ſo muſt his Mother be childleſs among Women, 1 *Sam.* 15. 33. Jer. 19. 13.

(5.) God puniſheth Men in the Matter or Object in which they have ſinned. If *David* be proud of the Multitude of his People, and out of the Pride of his Heart will have them numbred, God will chaſten him by diminiſhing his People; threeſcore and ten thouſand of them ſhall die by the Peſtilence. If *Jehoſhaphat* join himſelf with wicked *Ahaziah* King of *Iſrael*, and in compliance with him builds Ships that they may go to *Tarſhiſh*, his Ships ſhall be broken, and his Purpoſes ſhall be diſappointed. Thus we have in many Inſtances ſeen the Truth of what was ſpoken, That God often makes choice of ſuch Puniſhments as point at the Sin for which they were inflicted. 2 Sam. 24. 15. 2 Chron. 20. 35, 36, 37.

This

This God doth for ſeveral Reaſons.

1. To convince thoſe who are obſtinately blind, and will not ſee their Sins, nor own the Evils that light on them, to be the Puniſhments of thoſe Sins. Men are naturally ſo unwilling to acknowledg their own Guilt, and that they ſuffer for their Sins, that they endeavour to make any other Conſtruction of thoſe Evils which befal them, rather than to yield that God thereby intended to puniſh them for their Tranſgreſſions. Sometimes they will impute all to the Malice of ſecond Cauſes and the Inſtruments of their Sufferings, never looking ſo high as God, without whom no Creature could touch them: Sometimes they will fancy that ſuch Evils light upon them by chance, and not by Divine Providence ordering them for their Puniſhment or Correction. But now when God's Dealings bear ſuch a Reſemblance of, and Correſpondence with their Sins, they are forced to ſee and acknowledg their Sins, and the exact Juſtice of God in their Puniſhment. A remarkable Example hereof we have in *Adonibezek*, who when his Thumbs and great Toes were cut off, was thereby enforced to give Glory to God's Juſtice,

ſtice, ſaying, *Threeſcore and ten Kings having their Thumbs and great Toes cut off, gathered their Meat under my Table: as I have done, ſo God hath requited me.* Judg. 1. 7.

2. To help the Weakneſs of thoſe who are in ſome meaſure willing to ſee their Sins, and to diſcern God's End in his Corrections, but cannot do it ſo eaſily, unleſs ſomething in the Correction it ſelf lead them to the Sight of their Sin. Thus when a Man ſuffers in the ſame kind in which he hath been injurious to others, or when a Man loſeth by thoſe unlawful Artifices by which he made account to increaſe his Gain, he cannot but take notice of his Sin in the Puniſhment, which otherwiſe perhaps he would have over-look'd.

3. God hereby makes the Chaſtiſement work more kindly and effectually. For theſe Circumſtances pointing at a Man's Sin ſo evidently, do add much to the ſmarting of the Rod with which God corrects, and makes Men take his Chaſtiſements the more to Heart. And all this ſtirs up more earneſt Deſires and Endeavours to anſwer the end of his Corrections. Phyſicians when they give gentle Phyſick, or have to do either with obſtinate or ſluggiſh Bodies, put

put in ſomewhat to animate and quicken the Operation of their Preſcriptions: So God by theſe Circumſtances ſo directly pointing at a Man's Sin, quickens the Operation of his ſpiritual Phyſick, which without theſe Circumſtances would little affect the Patient, or ſtir thoſe bad Humours which are to be carried off.

4. God hereby ſometimes intends alſo the Vindication of his Juſtice and Holineſs before the World. When Men have ſinned grievouſly and openly, ſo as the World hath taken notice of it, God will have the World alſo take notice of his Severity againſt ſuch Sins: and to that end he writes the Sin in fair and legible Characters upon the Puniſhment, ſo as all that paſs by may ſay, *Verily there is a God that judgeth in the Earth.* But now if God ſhould not thus point at the Sin by the Puniſhment, many who took notice of the Sin would never take notice of the Puniſhment thereof; and conſequently God's Hatred of Sin, and his Severity againſt it would not ſo manifeſtly appear. For though God ſhould inflict as ſevere a Puniſhment on the Sinner in ſome other kind, yet few would underſtand what Sin

God

God thereby intended to puniſh; and ſo his Juſtice and Holineſs would be as little vindicated in the Judgment of the greateſt part of thoſe who had taken notice of the Sin, as if he had not puniſhed the Sin at all.

5. God thus points at the Sin by the Puniſhment, to give warning to others, that they may take heed how they venture upon thoſe Sins which they ſee are ſo odious unto God, and ſo ſeverely and remarkably puniſhed by him; that others may ſee and fear, *and do no more any ſuch Wickedneſs*, as God ſpeaks touching the end of the Execution of Vindictive Juſtice by the Magiſtrate. So then to return to that which gave occaſion of all that hath been ſaid concerning the ſeveral Ways of God's pointing at the Sin by the Puniſhment; by what hath been ſaid it appears that our Afflictions are a ſpecial help to lead us to the ſight of our Sins; and therefore in that reſpect as well as in others, the time of Affliction is the meeteſt Seaſon for ſearching and trying our ways. By the help that our Afflictions then afford us, we may then find out thoſe Sins which at another time we ſhould not ſo eaſily diſcover. Deut. 13. 11.

Now

Now to apply what hath been ſpoken in a Word or two.

Uſe 1. If this ſearching and trying of our Ways in order to the finding out and forſaking of our Sins, be the ſpecial Duty, the great Work required of us in time of Affliction, how is it that this Work is for the moſt part leaſt thought of? How is it that there is ſo much complaining among us, but ſo little Searching? ſo much enquiring after Remedies, and whatſoever other means may afford us Relief, but ſo little Enquiry after our Sins that obſtruct the Operation, and blaſt the Succeſs of all other Means? How is it that this ſearching and trying our Ways, which ſhould be the firſt thing we do in time of Affliction, is commonly the laſt? The laſt did I ſay? Yea rather, how is it that it is for the moſt part wholly omitted, even when no other Means that can be thought of are omitted? How is it that many Afflictions ſucceeding one after another, do ſo hardly bring us to this ſearching and trying our Ways at laſt? Surely if there were nothing elſe to prove the Excellency and Uſefulneſs of this Work, yet this were enough, that our

our corrupt Nature is ſo extreamly averſe from it. Such untoward Hearts and Natures have we, that the beſt things are moſt unacceptable, and moſt againſt the hair to us. Could we be perſwaded to make this our firſt Buſineſs when any Affliction firſt arreſts us, how many Trials might we avoid? And how much might we either ſhorten or ſweeten thoſe which God ſees good to exerciſe us with? Conſider the evil Conſequents of our Neglect of this Duty.

1ſt. By Neglect hereof we do what in us lies that God may loſe the end of his Corrections.

2dly. We loſe the Benefit of them.

3dly. We either lengthen out preſent Afflictions, or make way for others to ſucceed, if theſe ſhould be removed. Now what extream Folly is it to run upon theſe great Evils, rather than put our ſelves to the Trouble of taking that Courſe which God puts us upon for our ſpeedy and effectual Relief! What is it that makes us ſo unwilling? Is it the Unpleaſingneſs of the Work? But all good things are ſo to our ſinful Nature.

Uſe 2. What is diſpleaſing at firſt, will become pleaſant and delightful after

ter you ſhall have been inured to it.

Is it your Love to ſome particular Sin, and your Unwillingneſs to leave it? If that be at the bottom, take heed of it; you do but harbour a Snake in your Boſom, that will ſting you to Death if you ſtill cheriſh it: that Sin as dearly as you love it, will certainly be your Ruine, unleſs you find it out and forſake it.

Is it your Sloth and Unwillingneſs to be at the Coſt of ſo much Pains, as a narrow Search into your Heart and Ways would require? But,

(1.) Can you take Pains to better Purpoſe? Is there any thing in the World that better deſerves your Pains?

(2.) Do you not take a great deal more Pains about Matters of ſmall Conſequence, in compariſon of what concerns your Soul, and your Peace with God? Can you be content to lay out your Strength and ſpend your Spirits in purſuit of the things of the World, and yet ſtick at a little Pains to be taken about your ſpiritual Eſtate? Have you not ſome time heretofore taken a great deal more Pains in purſuit of Sin and ſinful Vanities, than the ſearching into your Heart and Ways need coſt you? Have

Have you not often tired your ſelf in the Ways of Sin with greateſt Delight; and yet are you ſo nice and tender, ſo indulgent and favourable to your ſelf, as you cannot now be perſwaded to be at the Expence of a little Pains to enquire how Matters ſtand between God and your Soul? If this be your Temper, you muſt not think of going to Heaven upon theſe Terms: You muſt reſolve to take Pains, or you ſhall never get thither. There muſt be *ſtriving to enter in at the ſtrait Gate*; and *working out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling*; and a *taking the Kingdom of Heaven by Violence*, or you will fall ſhort of it. What ſay you to theſe things? Are you at length perſwaded and reſolved to take ſome Pains to make a ſtrict Search into your ſelf? And is it the full Purpoſe of your Heart to overlook no Sin that by your moſt diligent and impartial Enquiry you can diſcover? Then for your Direction herein,

1. Make uſe of that Help which the Circumſtances of God's Chaſtiſements offer you. Try what you may thence gain towards the Diſcovery of the Sin whereby you have provoked God to afflict you.

1*ſt.* Conſider the Circumſtance of time when God was firſt pleaſed to lay his Hand upon you. Enquire what you had been then doing, and whether your Affliction did not arreſt you even while you were acting Sin in one kind or other, or whether it did not follow ſome Sin at the Heels.

2*dly.* Enquire whether the Place where your Affliction ſeized on you, were not that in which you had ſinned. It may be it ſeized on you in your Shop, where you had been cheating ſome Body; in the Ale-houſe, where you had been miſpending your time, and abuſing your ſelf by Intemperance; or it may be in ſome other Place as bad or worſe.

3*dly.* Conſider the Inſtruments of your Affliction. Doth not God puniſh you by thoſe who were your Companions in Sin? or whoſe Aſſiſtance you made uſe of for the commiſſion of your Sin? Doth he not take thoſe very things with which you ſinned, and make them the Inſtruments of your Suffering?

4*thly.* Enquire whether there be nothing in the manner of God's chaſtening you, that may lead you to the Sight of your Sin. He hath chaſtened you with

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the Scourge of the Tongue; have not you abuſed your Tongue to the defaming and injuring of others in the ſame kind? You have met with falſe and deceitful Dealings from thoſe whom you thought you might have truſted: Have not you been as falſe and deceitful your ſelf? And doth not God meaſure to you according to the Meaſure that others have received from you? God lays bodily Weakneſſes and Infirmities on you: Are they not the proper Effects of your Intemperance, and other lewd and debauched Courſes, by which you have brought thoſe Diſtempers and Weakneſſes upon you? God afflicts you in your Children: Have not you ſet your Affections too much upon them? Or have you not neglected them in their Education? Or have you not given them ill Example?

5*thly*. Conſider the Matter and Object of your Affliction, and ſee if that may not help you to ſee your Sin. God hath taken away part of your Eſtate from you: When you had more than now you have, did you not abuſe it? God hath blaſted your Beauty: Were you not proud of it? God hath poured Reproach and Contempt upon you:

Did you not forfeit your good Name and Reputation, and make your ſelf vile by your Sins? Have you not diſhonoured God, for which he hath juſtly made you to be lightly eſteemed?

2. Compare your ſelf with the Rule: lay the Law of God before you, and try your ſelf thereby in reference to all the ſeveral Branches thereof. *By the*
Rom. 3. 20. *Law comes the Knowledg of Sin.* And here reſt not in Generalities, but deſcend to Particulars. Take an Account of your ſelf, and make Enquiry wherein you have declined or ſwerved from any part of that Duty which God requires of you. He that lays any one of God's Laws before him, taking only the general Letter of it as 'tis expreſs'd in the Commandment, may think he hath not much failed of the Performance of what the Law requires; yea perhaps he may be ready to juſtify himſelf, ſaying with the young Man in the
Mat. 19. 20. Goſpel, *All this have I kept from my Youth:* And yet when he comes to look more narrowly into the ſeveral Parts of his Duty contained under that Law, he may find he hath offended many Ways, and that he hath not only come far ſhort of exact Conformity

to

to the Rule, but failed more or leſs in almoſt every thing that the Law requires, excepting only thoſe fouler Acts of Sin which in the Letter of ſome of the Commandments are by Name forbidden.

3. In this Search be ſure that you avoid that common Error of heeding and looking after Sins of Commiſſion only, little or not at all regarding Sins of Omiſſion. Though we make light of our Omiſſions, yet they may be ſuch as God may be highly provoked by them.

To neglect Prayer in your Family, and the Inſtruction of thoſe that are under your Charge, may be ſmall Sins in your Account, and ſcarce worth the taking notice of. But they are not ſo in God's Account: He ſees that the Omiſſion of theſe Duties is the ready way to bring upon us a Deluge of Profaneneſs, Irreligion and Atheiſm: and that they who make no Conſcience of theſe Duties, do in effect ſay unto God, *Depart from us*; they do what in them lies to baniſh God, not only out of their Families, but out of the Land: For if theſe Duties ſhould be as ſhamefully neglected by all as they are by

ſome, and thoſe too many, what would become of our Poſterity in the next Generation? Would not the whole Face of the Land be covered with Darkneſs as thick as that of *Egypt?* And what would attend that Darkneſs, but all manner of Ungodlineſs and Debauchery, the inſeparable Conſequents of Ignorance?

The total Omiſſion of ſecret Prayer you may think is no great Matter, ſo long as you ſometimes in publick or private join with others in that Duty: but God hath other Thoughts of it; he knows that all your other Services, as by you performed, are little better than mere Formalities, as long as you neglect ſecret Duties. He knows the great Conſequence of keeping up a conſtant Courſe of ſecret Prayer, and that without it 'tis impoſſible that either your Heart or Converſation ſhould be ordered aright. He knows that the very Life and Vigour of all other Duties depends on this.

The Neglect of ſhewing Mercy to thoſe that are afflicted, you may think is no great Matter, ſo long as you do no Man any Wrong; but God lays more Streſs upon ſuch Omiſſions than you

you do; his righteous Sentence is, He that hath no Pity for others, ſhall have none himſelf; *He ſhall have Judgment without Mercy, that hath ſhewed no Mercy.* Pro.21.13 Jam.2.13.

The Neglect of ſome one publick Ordinance, as the Lord's Supper for example, you may think is a thing that God takes little notice of, ſo long as you give your conſtant Attendance on other Ordinances: but you conſider not how much Evil and Danger there is in the deliberate and wilful Omiſſion of any known Duty, and ſuch is this. For ſuch an Omiſſion as this was *Moſes* in Danger of loſing his Life; for neglecting to circumciſe his Son, *the Lord met him*, took hold of him, *and ſought to kill him*: neither would he let him go, till *Zipporah his Wife had taken a ſharp Stone, and cut off the Foreskin of her Son.* Neither may you think that any colourable Excuſe that you may pretend you have for Neglect of a Duty or an Ordinance, will bear you out. *Moſes* in Probability might have pleaded ſomething for his Excuſe: his Wife *Zipporah*, as it ſeems by her Carriage, was extreamly averſe from having her Son circumciſed, ſo that *Moſes* could Exod. 4. 24,25,26.

not do it, but there would be a Breach between them; there would be no Quiet in the Family. This Conſideration had been ſomewhat, if the thing had been of an indifferent Nature, and not a Matter of Duty: but where God's expreſs Command was, That every Male-child ſhould be Circumciſed, this Excuſe could not juſtify *Moſes* his Neglect. Look well to it that your Excuſes be good, by which you would defend your abſenting your ſelf from any Ordinance of God. It had need be a ſtrong and a clear Ground on which you go, when you ſhall willingly and upon Deliberation wave an expreſs Ordinance of God. But this by the way.

4. Think not you have done enough if you have been ſearching within, and round about you near at hand; if you have with ſome Diligence enquired how Matters are with you at preſent, or have been of late; but look farther off, and ſurvey the former part of your paſt Life; God may call to remembrance Sins long ſince committed, and chaſten you for them. Thus God brought a Famine of three Years con-
2Sam.21.1 tinuance upon the *Iſraelites*, for *Saul's* Cruelty againſt the *Gibeonites*, though

Saul

Saul had then been dead many Years. Yea, God may chaſten you for old Sins, though you have long ſince left them; and this for ſeveral Reaſons.

1*ſt*. Though you have left them, yet it may be that you never truly repented of them. A Man may break off the Practice of ſome Sins, becauſe they conſiſt not with his temporal Advantage, or his Credit, or his worldly Deſigns and Intereſt. Upon ſuch Conſiderations as theſe a Man may have forſaken ſome particular Sins, though he never hated them, nor was truly humbled for them.

2*dly*. A Man may have truly repented of his Sin, he may have been truly humbled for it, and forſaken it, and yet he may ſtill want ſome Degrees of that thorow Humiliation which God expecteth.

3*dly*. Former Sins long ſince committed and forſaken, may now be almoſt forgotten; at leaſt they may not be remembred with that freſh and lively Senſe of the great Evil and Hainouſneſs of them, with that mourning over them, and loathing of our ſelves for them, as heretofore.

4*thly*.

4*thly*. God may ſee that you are in Danger of returning to thoſe Sins again, that you have long ſince forſaken, and verily thought your ſelf at ſo great a diſtance from them, as you ſhould never have any Inclination to commit them again. So then 'tis poſſible that God may afflict you for old Sins, long ſince forſaken upon ſome worldly Conſideration, that he may bring you to ſound Repentance for them; or that he may more throughly humble you for the Sins that you have truly repented of; or that he may thereby rub up and renew the Remembrance of former Sins, and therewith alſo renew your former Sorrow, and loathing of your ſelf for thoſe Sins, which Time and Forgetfulneſs, and carnal Security, have almoſt worn out; and laſtly, that he may prevent your Relapſes into the ſame Sins. Thus you ſee that God may have many Reaſons to correct you for former Sins; and therefore that if you will find out the Sin for which he chaſtens you, it will ſometimes concern you to caſt your Eye far back, and take a View of thoſe your former Sins, which you have long ago quitted and relinquiſhed.

5*thly*.

5thly. This ſearching and trying your Ways is a Work that muſt be often repeated; and that not only in regard that you every Day contract new Guilt, and run afreſh in Arrears with God, but becauſe your former Sins may not be diſcovered preſently, though you ſearch after them with ſome good meaſure of Care and Diligence. When we ſearch after a thing which much concerns us to find, though we light not on it at firſt, yet we ſearch a ſecond and a third time, and will not eaſily give over ſearching until we have found it. You have been making Search after the Sin for which God afflicts you, and you cannot find it; you are ſtill in the dark, and cannot underſtand God's Intentions in laying his Hand upon you: But ſearch yet once more, yea a third and a fourth time, if need be; you may light on that at laſt which you have often overlook'd. Whatever the Iſſue of your Enquiry be, you will not loſe your Labour. He who digged up all his Vineyard, in hope to find the Treaſure which he had been told was hid there, though he found not the Treaſure he look'd after, yet he had it in another kind which he expected not:

not: the looſening and mellowing of the Earth brought him in a more plentiful Vintage the next Year. If by your Search you ſhould not at laſt diſcover any one particular Sin, which you can think God aimed at in the Affliction which he hath laid upon you, yet you may light on ſomewhat elſe which may requite your Pains. If no other Benefit accrue to you, yet the Satisfaction you have in having uſed ſo much Diligence in reviewing the former Paſſages of your Life, will be a ſufficient Recompence of the Trouble you have been at therein. But yet this is not all; there are divers other certain Advantages which redound to us from taking a view of our former Sins, and which, if it be done in a due manner, we never fail of attaining, though we find not the particular Sin which we look'd after. It makes us more humble; it raiſeth our Eſteem and Valuation of Chriſt; it fills us with Admiration of the free Grace and rich Mercy of God in pardoning ſo many and ſo great Sins; it inflames our Love, and increaſeth our Thankfulneſs to God; and it quickens us to more Care and Watchfulneſs, to a more

more conſtant and ſerious Endeavour of ſincere and univerſal Obedience for the time to come.

Now though it be moſt ſeaſonable to ſearch and try our Ways in time of Affliction, yet there are alſo ſome other ſpecial Seaſons for this Duty. As,

1. At any time when we are in any great Fear or Danger; then though God doth not yet ſtrike us, yet he ſhakes his Rod over us; and therefore to prevent what may be coming upon us, and to avert thoſe Evils which we fear, there can be no better Courſe than that we make a through Search after thoſe our Sins, for which God ſeems to threaten us.

2. After a Man hath fallen into any great Sin: Such Falls do for the moſt part fore-run ſome Affliction, and make for the preſent a Breach between God and us: For the cloſing up of which Breach, and renewing of our Peace with God, it will concern us not only to be humbled for that particular Sin, but to make diligent Enquiry after ſuch other Sins as may interpoſe between God and us, and deprive us of the Light of his Countenance, and the Senſe of his Love.

3. When

3. When we are in Expectation of, or Suitors unto God for any ſpecial Mercy. For conſidering that our Sins ſeparate between God and us, and withhold good things from us, nothing can be more ſeaſonable or neceſſary, than that when we are waiting on God for any ſpecial Favour, we carefully ſearch and try our Ways, that no Sin may hinder our Mercies, obſtruct the Paſſage of them to us, or blaſt the Means which we make uſe of for obtaining them.

4. Before our more ſolemn and extraordinary Approaches unto God; as namely, before our drawing near unto the Table of the Lord. God will be ſanctified in all our Approaches unto him; but eſpecially in our moſt ſolemn Approaches. And in particular, as concerning our drawing near unto the Table of the Lord, a more than ordinary Search into our ſelves at that time, is in ſeveral Reſpects ſeaſonable.

(1.) In regard of the expreſs Command of God: *Let a Man examine himſelf, and ſo let him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup.* 1 Cor. 11. 28.

(2.) In regard of the great Danger of coming unworthily: *He that eateth and*

and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himſelf. Now unleſs a Man ſearch and try his Heart and Ways, how can he know whether he be an unworthy Receiver or no? He muſt needs run a great Hazard who comes Hand over Head, before he hath enquired into himſelf, whether he be a meet Gueſt for the Table of the Lord or not. Yea, 'tis very much to be feared, that he who is ſo careleſs as that he never enquires into his Fitneſs, comes unpreparedly, and eats and drinks unworthily. Ver. 29.

(3.) In regard of the great Benefits which we ſhall reap thereby, and the Uſefulneſs thereof, in relation to the Sacrament.

1*ſt.* In that Ordinance we are to bewail and mourn over our Sins; we muſt come to it with godly Sorrow for them: And how can that be unleſs we know them? And how can we come to know them, unleſs we ſearch after them? 'Tis the reviewing of our Actions that ſets before us the Sins for which we are to be humbled, and affects our Hearts with them.

2*dly.* We are at that Ordinance to renew our Covenant with God, and

to

to take up fresh Resolutions of cleaving to him with full purpose of Heart for the future. And what is more conducing hereunto, than that we by a narrow Search into our selves, be informed how and wherein we have departed from God, and broken Covenant with him?

3*dly*. We are there to act Faith on Christ for the Pardon of our Sins; and we there expect to have the Pardon of them sealed unto us: in both which Respects it is then most seasonable and requisite that we should look back and take a Survey of our former Sins. For,

1. Hereby we shall come to know what, and how many and great those Sins are, for the Pardon whereof we are to act Faith on Christ.

2. We shall be the better able to value that Pardon of so many and so great Sins which he is pleased in that Ordinance to seal to us; and consequently we shall the better understand how much Love and Thankfulness is due from us, both unto Christ who hath with his Blood purchased the Pardon of our Sins for us, and to God the Father, who for Christ's sake hath bestowed it on us.

4*thly*.

4*thly*. If this Search and Trial of our ſelves were conſtantly and duly made before the Sacrament, of how great Advantage would it be towards our Growth and Increaſe in Grace? By this Courſe we ſhould,

(1.) Diſcover whether we thrive in Grace or no; we ſhould evidently perceive whether it be better or worſe with us ſince our laſt appearing before the Lord at his Table.

(2.) We ſhould with Thankfulneſs acknowledg any further Degrees of Grace or Strength againſt Corruption that we have attained.

(3.) We ſhould be humbled for our Backſlidings and Declinings after our ſolemn Engagements to the contrary, at our laſt partaking at the Table of the Lord.

(4.) We ſhould renew and ſtrengthen our Reſolutions againſt our Sins, and engage our ſelves to a more conſcientious Performance of whatſoever Duties God requires of us.

If any Man think there is ſmall Benefit to be expected from ſuch a Courſe, he is certainly one who hath been little acquainted with it, or hath not obſerved it with Care and Conſtancy. Many of

those who come to that Ordinance, make no Conscience at all of preparing themselves, but as 'tis to be feared, rush upon it inconsiderately and profanely. Others prepare themselves but overly and carelesly; or if sometimes they take more Pains than ordinary in searching and trying their Ways, and in other Parts of that Preparation which is requisite for a due attendance on God in that Ordinance, yet 'tis but very seldom that they are at this Pains. For the most part they suffer one thing or other to divert them, and take them off from bestowing time that way; and so the great Business of preparing themselves being put off to the last, is but half done, or as good as wholly omitted. Reflect and ask your own Conscience how it hath been with you; and if you find this to have been your very Case, then never object that there is little Advantage from such a Course, until you have practised it better and with more Constancy.

But to return to the Business of the Text, the searching and trying of our Ways in time of any extraordinary Affliction.

You will say, perhaps, you have searched

ſearched and done it with all the Seriouſneſs and Diligence you could, and earneſtly implored God's Aſſiſtance therein; and this you have done often, and yet you cannot underſtand what particular Sin or Sins God aims at in the Afflictions which it hath pleaſed him to lay upon you. You diſcover Multitudes of Sins that you have been guilty of; but among them all to diſcern which they are which God at preſent corrects you for above others, is that which by all your Enquiry you cannot attain.

Anſw. I anſwer, It may ſo be, that you cannot ſingle out any one particular Sin; neither, it may be, did God ever intend it: He ſometimes by Afflictions intends to humble you for Sin in general; to correct your general Careleſneſs and Slackneſs in the whole Courſe of your Life; and to engage you to walk every way more ſtrictly and humbly before him.

He intends alſo perhaps to mind you of old Sins which you have almoſt forgotten, and to provoke you to renew your Repentance and Humiliation for them.

Wherefore when at any time you can-

not find out any particular Sin, for which above others God ſhould at preſent have a Controverſy with you, fall upon Sin in the general, and improve your Affliction towards the attaining of greater Meaſures of Humiliation and Reformation: judg and humble your ſelf for old Sins as if they had been lately committed; and let the Sight of all your other Sins lead you up to the Fountain of all Actual Sin, to your Original Corruption; and bewail that, and loath your ſelf for it.

Moreover, you muſt remember, that God hath other Ends in afflicting his, beſides the chaſtening of them for Sin; he alſo by Afflictions tries, exerciſeth, and improveth Faith, Patience, and other Graces. He by Afflictions ſtirs you up to Prayer, weans your Heart from the World, helps you the better to reliſh and ſavour Heavenly things, the Sweetneſs whereof you taſte not when you are glutted with outward Proſperity. If you be any way a Gainer by your Affliction, you have reaſon to take Comfort therein, and to be thankful.

Thus I have done with the former Duty in time of Affliction, namely, the ſearching and trying of our Ways. I come

come now to the latter Duty, in thoſe Words. *And let us turn unto the Lord:* Of which I ſhall ſpeak briefly, becauſe I have in good part prevented my ſelf in what hath been ſpoken concerning the former Duty.

From the manner of Expreſſion or Phraſe, of *turning to the Lord*, we learn the true Nature both of Sin and Repentance. Sin is an Averſion and turning away from God, and Repentance conſequently is a returning to him. This is manifeſt from the uſual Language of the Scriptures, which call Sin a forſaking God, a departing from God, a revolting from him, and the like. The Scriptures thus expreſſing Sin are ſo frequent, that I need not ſtand to mention them: And the Scriptures ſetting forth the Nature of Repentance by returning unto God, are as frequent. That the Nature of Sin lies in an Averſion from God, and Converſion to the Creature, will better appear if we deſcend to ſome particular Inſtances. Worldly Joy, what is it but a Joy in the Creature inſtead of the Creator, who is the proper Object of ſpiritual Joy? Carnal Confidence, what is it but a confiding in, and reliance on the Creature inſtead of God?

And ſo 'tis no other than a leaving of God, to betake our ſelves to the Creature for thoſe Supplies and Aſſiſtances which we ſtand in need of. So the Prophet ſets forth the Nature of that Sin; *Curſed* Jer. 17. 5. *be the Man that truſteth in Man, and maketh Fleſh his Arm, and whoſe Heart departeth from the Lord.* And although this our departing from God, and betaking our ſelves to the Creature, be not ſo apparent in divers other Sins, yet if we conſider the Matter throughly, we ſhall find the thing is ſtill the ſame: For in all Sin 'tis ſome kind of Profit or Pleaſure, or Content or Satisfaction in one kind or other, that we look after. Now we ſin when we ſeek theſe things in the Creature, turning aſide from God in whom there is moſt eminently whatſoever the Creature can afford us towards our Satisfaction, and infinitely more. Hence may be inferred ſeveral things.

1. The great Evil of Sin. In every Sin God is ſet at nought and undervalued, and the Creature is preferred before him. Yea the Creature is upon the matter made our God, while that Truſt and Confidence is put in it, that is only due to God; or that Satisfaction and Hap-

Happineſs is expected from it, that is to be expected only from God. The Apoſtle ſaith, *The covetous Man is an Idolater*, Eph. 5. 5. becauſe he makes an Idol of his Riches, ſetting them up in the room of God, and making them the Object of his Truſt and Reliance inſtead of God. The ſame is in ſome degree done in every Sin, when a Man makes the Creature the Object of that Joy and Delight, of that Satisfaction and Complacency that he ought to take in God only. Now this is an high Affront to God. What viler Indignity can be offered him, than that his Creatures ſhould be preferred before him?

2. We may hence alſo infer the extream Folly that there is in Sin; for therein we forſake the *Fountain of living Waters, and hew us out broken Ciſterns that can hold no Water*, as God complains of his People, *Jer.* 2. 13. We forſake God in whom is all Fulneſs, and betake our ſelves to the Creature which is mere Vanity and Emptineſs.

3. Hence alſo we may infer the ſingular Goodneſs of God to us in our Afflictions, the Deſign and End whereof is to reduce us from our Wandrings, and to bring us back again to God from

whom we have gone aſtray; to recal us from following the ſmaller Streams and empty Rivulets of Diſſatisfaction and Vexation of Spirit, to the full and overflowing Fountain of all true Bliſs and Happineſs.

4. We may alſo hence infer, that the Duty of Repentance ought not to be ſo diſpleaſing and unacceptable to us as uſually it is: For as ſowr and diſtaſteful a Work as it ſeems to be, 'tis but a returning to him who is the Well of Life, and a renewing our Acquaintance and Peace with him in whom our true Comforts are lodged, in whoſe Favour is Pſal. 63. 3. Life, and *whoſe Loving-kindneſs is better than Life.*

And ſo much of that Obſervation, from the Phraſe or manner of Expreſſion, by which our true Repentance and Reformation are ſignified.

Now that our Return unto God is the thing that God expects from us in our Afflictions, and which will aſſuredly prove the moſt effectual Means for removing God's afflicting Hand from us, I have already ſhewed in handling the former Duty. And all that I ſhall here add, ſhall be to ſhew very briefly, how we muſt return unto God, that his cha-

chaſtiſing Hand may be taken off from us, and by what Means we may be kept from leaving him again; and then anſwer one Objection that may be made againſt what ſhall have been ſpoken. Now as to the manner how we muſt return unto God if we will be freed from our Preſſures.

(1.) We muſt return ſpeedily. *I thought on my VVays, and turned my Feet unto thy Teſtimonies: I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy Commandments*, ſaid *David*, Pſal. 119. 59, 60. What through our Sluggiſhneſs, and what through our Unwillingneſs to forget our Sins, we are long a deliberating to return, and many Attempts and Eſſays we make at returning before we return indeed; and God in his Providence deals with us accordingly: he alſo ſeems to attempt to deliver us, but proceeds no further becauſe we are ſo backward, and our Motions are ſo ſlow and inconſtant. Were our Returns to God ſpeedy, we might hope they would ſpeed our Deliverance.

(2.) We muſt return thorowly. We many times take ſome Steps towards God, and having gone half way, we ſit down. Our Reformation is imperfect

and

Hoſea 7. 8. and partial. We are like *Ephraim*, a *Cake not turned*; half Dough, and baked on one ſide only: and we fare accordingly. Though we have ſome Deliverance, as God ſpeaks, 2 *Chron.* 12. 7. yet God doth not go through with his Work, becauſe we go not through with our Work.

(3.) We muſt return reſolutely and ſtedfaſtly, as I may ſo ſpeak; I mean with a reſolute, fixed and ſtedfaſt Purpoſe of Heart, not to forſake God again, but to cleave unto him. When we return, God is moſt ready to entertain us, and be at Peace with us; but 'tis ever
Pſal. 85. 8. on condition that we *turn not again unto Folly*. The Defect hereof was that which God complained of in his People; their
Pſal. 78. 8. *Spirit was not ſtedfaſt with God*. Their
Hoſea 6. 4. *Goodneſs was as the Morning Cloud, and like the early Dew that goeth away*.

To prevent this our Return to Sin, and to enable us to cleave ſtedfaſtly unto God, (which was the ſecond thing) theſe things would be done.

1*ſt*. Be ever ſenſible of your Proneneſs to revolt and depart from God. We are naturally *bent to Backſliding*, as God ſpeaks, *Hoſ.* 11. 7. The Senſe of our Weakneſs is one good Preſervative againſt it.

2*dly*.

2*dly*. Every Day acknowledg all your Strength to adhere unto God, to be from God, and give him the Glory of it: Say with *David*, *Thou upholdeſt me in mine Integrity*. This your thankful Acknowledgment of God in your Stedfaſtneſs and Perſeverance, is the way ſtill to engage him to uphold and eſtabliſh you. Pſal. 41. 12

3*dly*. Earneſtly beg of God that he would keep you cloſe to himſelf, and preſerve you from declining. Beg with *David*, that God would *unite your Heart to him, to fear his Name*, Pſal. 86. 11. And that according to his Promiſe, *Jer.* 32. 40. he would be pleaſed to put his Fear in your Heart, that you may not depart from him.

4*thly*. Frequently ſet before your Eyes in your moſt ſerious Meditations, the Happineſs of adhering conſtantly to God, and the extream Folly and Miſery of departing from him. Recount the Comforts you have found in cleaving to him, and how often and ſorely you have ſmarted for departing from him.

5*thly*. Be ever watchful over your ſelf; eſpecially keep your Heart with all Diligence, obſerving and oppoſing the firſt Motions to Sin.

6*thly*. Daily renew your purpoſe of cleaving

cleaving to God, and of reſiſting thoſe particular Sins by which you have heretofore moſt frequently departed from him.

And ſo I come to ſpeak to the Objection which may be made, which was the laſt thing to be ſpoken to.

Object. *I have*, ſay you, *both found out my Sin for which God afflicted me, and alſo forſaken it; and yet my Affliction ſtill continues. How is this conſiſtent with God's Promiſes of Deliverance out of Trouble upon our Return to him?*

Anſw. 1. You have found out and forſaken one Sin, but it may be you have not found out all: there may be other Sins not yet diſcovered, for which God's Hand is ſtill ſtretched out againſt you. It may be the Sin which God principally intended, is ſtill hid from your Eyes.

2. It may be though you have for the preſent left your Sin, yet you have not left it out of a true Hatred of it, but only that you might be eaſed from the preſent Smart of your Affliction. God ſees that you ſtill retain an Affection for your Sin, and that though you have left it, yet you look back on it with a ſecret Deſire after it, as *Lot*'s Wife look'd back upon *Sodom*.

3. God

3. God hath alſo other Deſigns in afflicting you, as hath been ſaid; 'tis probable your Faith hath not yet been ſufficiently tried, and Patience hath not had its perfect Work; and for theſe and other ſuch Ends, God ſees good yet ſtill to keep you in the Furnace of Affliction, though your Droſs be in ſome good meaſure purged away.

4. However it be, or whatever other ſecret Reaſons God may have for his Dealings with you, 'tis fit that you ſhould patiently expect God's own Seaſon of Deliverance, as he hath waited for you. Of the two there is infinitely more reaſon that you ſhould be willing to wait for him.

The

The Tenth Sermon.

Ezra 9. 13, 14.

After all that is come upon us for our evil Deeds, and for our great Trespass; seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our Iniquities deserve, and hast given us such a Deliverance as this;

Should we again break thy Commandments, and join in Affinity with the People of these Abominations? Wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no Remnant nor Escaping?

A Sermon preached the Day the Fire began at Northampton.

THIS Chapter contains *Ezra*'s Address unto God, in which he confesseth and bewaileth the Sins of the Jews after their Return from the Captivity of *Babylon*, and more especially their having joined themselves

selves in Affinity with Strangers, and married Wives of those idolatrous Nations round about them; which was directly contrary to the Law of God, forbidding all such Affinities and Alliances. Now this their Sin was so much the greater, and so much the more difficult an Undertaking it was to put a stop to it, upon a threefold Account.

1. In regard of the general spreading of this Sin among them, and the great Multitude of such as had contracted this Guilt. We find, *Ezra* 10. 16, 17. that they who undertook the rolling away of this Reproach, and the reducing of the People to the Observation of the Law, were three full Months imployed in examining Offenders in this kind, and in taking Security from them that they would put away their unlawful Wives: Had not the number of them been very great, much less time would have sufficed for transacting that Business.

2. In regard that they were not only the common, and the ordinary and inferiour sort of People that had thus transgressed the Law, but the Princes and the Rulers had been chief in this Trespass: And the Priests and Levites, as well as the Princes, had been deeply involved

Ver. 2.

as Chap. 10. 18, 19, &c.

volved in this Guilt. Yea, ſo far had this Corruption prevailed among them, that there were found even of the Sons of *Joſhua* the Son of *Jozadak* the high Prieſt, that had taken ſtrange Wives, as in the ſame Place we are informed.

3. In regard that ſome of them that were in this Treſpaſs, had been ſo long married to Strangers, that they had Ver. 44. Children by them. In all theſe reſpects, I ſay, as their Sin was exceeding great, ſo it was a Buſineſs full of Difficulty to attempt the Reformation of a People in theſe Circumſtances, and ſo far ingaged in illegal Practices. But however *Ezra* being a Man full of Zeal for the Glory of God, and for the Good of that People, is not diſcouraged by all this. Notwithſtanding all the Oppoſition that he was like to meet with in this hard Service, he couragiouſly ſets about it, and through the Preſence of God with him, and the Bleſſing of God upon his Endeavours, he is ſucceſsful in his Enterprize, and ſees a deſirable Iſſue thereof.

You who have Opportunities put into your Hands of doing any thing for God, and for the Good of the Place where God hath caſt your Lot, ſuffer not the Apprehenſion of Difficulties to diſmay

diſmay you: Ariſe and be doing what lies in you, and leave the Succeſs to God; he that once ſaid, *VVho art thou O great Mountain? before* Zerubbabel *thou ſhalt become a Plain*; can go before you, and make the crooked Places ſtreight, and the rough Ways plain: he can moſt eaſily either remove all thoſe Difficulties that diſhearten you, or lift you above them: he often gives that Succeſs to zealous and ſincere Endeavours which not only anſwers, but far exceeds all our Deſires and Expectations. But then let's be ſure we take holy *Ezra* for our Pattern, and obſerve his Method. Being to undertake a great and difficult Buſineſs, he begins with Humiliation: he moſt affectionately confeſſeth, mourns over, and bewails the Sins of that People, the Reformation whereof he deſigned to attempt. The more deeply you can be affected with, and take to Heart the Sins, Diſorders, and Abuſes that you would remove; the more ſincerely, cordially and affectionately you can mourn over them, and lament them; the more Tears you can ſhed for them in your Confeſſions of them before God, the better Succeſs may you hope your Endeavours of Reformation will be attended withal. Zech. 4. 7.

How paſſionately did *Ezra* lay to Heart the Sins of that People? As ſoon as he had heard how they had by illegal Affinities mingled themſelves with their idolatrous neighbouring Nations, how did he behave himſelf, and what deep Senſe of the Hainouſneſs of their Sin, and Greatneſs of their Provocation did he expreſs? *VVhen I heard the thing*, ſaith he, *I rent my Garment, and my Mantle, and pluck'd off the Hair of my Head, and of my Beard, and ſat down aſtonied: And at the Evening-Sacrifice I aroſe up from my Heavineſs; and having rent my Garment, and my Mantle, I fell upon my Knees, and ſpread out my Hands unto the Lord my God, and ſaid, O my God, I am aſhamed, and bluſh to lift up my Face to thee, my God; for our Iniquities are increaſed over our Head, and our Treſpaſs is grown up unto the Heavens.* And then he goes on in the ſame Extaſy of Affection, laying open God's unſpeakable Goodneſs to them, and the horrid Nature of their Provocation. And what's the Iſſue hereof, but ſuch a Reformation as a Man would wonder how it could ever be effected and brought about, conſidering how many the Offenders were, how great and conſiderable

ble the Perſons of many of them were, and what ſtrong Temptations and Ingagements they had to make them unwilling to abandon their Sin. But upon *Ezra*'s ſtrange and almoſt unexampled Humiliation, God was pleaſed to exert and put forth his Power in a ſtrange and extraordinary manner upon the Hearts of the Offenders, to prevail with them to diſclaim and renounce their Sin, notwithſtanding whatever carnal Motives and Conſiderations there were to endear it to them. If we could once attain to take Sin to Heart as he did, we might then expect to ſee better Fruits of our Endeavours after Reformation than yet we can. But this by the way.

In the Words that I have read, which are a part of *Ezra*'s Addreſs unto God by humble and affectionate Confeſſion of their Sin, he ſpreads and lays open the Aggravations of it, together with the Danger and ſad Iſſues of it, if they ſhould ſtill continue in it. The Aggravations thereof are theſe three.

(1.) The great Severity that God had formerly ſhewed againſt them for their Sins, which is ſet forth and expreſs'd in the firſt Words; *After all that is come*

upon us for our evil Deeds, and for our great Treſpaſs.

(2.) The merciful Tenderneſs and Compaſſion that God however even in that Severity was pleaſed to manifeſt towards them, in the next Words, *Seeing that thou our God haſt puniſhed us leſs than our Iniquities deſerve.*

(3.) The ſingular Favour God had ſhewed them in reſcuing them from under thoſe Calamities which their Sins had brought upon them in the Clauſe following; *And haſt given us ſuch a Deliverance as this.* Theſe were the things by which their Sin would be greatly heightned: after ſo much Severity, Compaſſion and Kindneſs, to have returned to Folly, and to have broken God's Commandments again, was to have done as bad as they could, as the Prophet ſpeaks, and to have given their Sins all the Aggravations that they were capable of.

Then as for the Danger they expoſed themſelves to, that was no leſs than utter Ruine and Deſtruction. After this Mixture of ſevere and merciful Providences, *ſhould we again break thy Commandments? wouldeſt thou not be angry with us till thou hadſt conſumed us, ſo that there*

there ſhould be no Remnant nor Eſcaping? They had indeed already broken God's Commandment in a grievous manner, and ſinned againſt him with an high Hand by thoſe unlawful Marriages. His meaning therefore is, ſhould we again break thy Commandment as we have done? Should we ſtill continue in our Sin, and obſtinately refuſe to be reduced to Obedience? If we ſhould ſtill perverſly and irreclaimably go on in our Treſpaſſes, *wouldeſt thou not be angry with us till thou hadſt conſumed us?* Of theſe Particulars in order as they lie in the Text.

I begin with the Aggravations of their Sin, the firſt of which is the great Severity God had formerly ſhewed againſt them for their paſt Tranſgreſſions: *After all that is come upon us for our evil Deeds, and for our great Treſpaſs; ſhould we again break thy Commandments?* Here divers things are obſervable.

1. That *Ezra* and all thoſe who joined with him in this Confeſſion of their Sins, did endeavour to aggravate their Sins by calling in and laying together all thoſe Circumſtances by which the Hainouſneſs of them might the better appear. And this they did to the end

their Hearts might be the more affected with them, and the more ſoundly humbled for them; as alſo that they might be the more willing to forſake them. And this is the Property of all true Penitents, they ever deſire to be throughly apprehenſive of the Evil of their Sins; and therefore they aggravate them to the utmoſt; in their Confeſſions charging themſelves fully with them, and laying as much Load upon themſelves as they can. They think they can never ſpeak enough againſt themſelves, nor ſufficiently diſcover and repreſent the Evil of their Ways, inſomuch that ſometimes they rather exceed than come ſhort herein, charging themſelves more heavily than there was cauſe for.

But Hypocrites, unhumbled and impenitent Sinners, are of a different temper; theſe inſtead of aggravating their Sins, are wont to extenuate and palliate them. If they be forced to confeſs them, 'tis for the moſt part but by halves that they do it. If they cannot but acknowledg they have offended, yet they will do it with an Apology, or with an Addition of ſomething that may qualify and leſſen their Sin: They are indeed ſometimes overtaken, but 'tis very

very rarely; 'tis when they are drawn aſide by ill Company, or overpower'd by the Strength of Temptation; that they are not the only Perſons that are faulty in that kind; that ſome others that would be eſteemed much better than themſelves, are much more blame-worthy; that there is no Man but muſt have his Allowances, and that it would go hard with us all if all our Actions ſhould be narrowly ſcanned; and the like. Theſe and ſuch like are the Excuſes which they plead, and the Defences they make for themſelves, when they ſhould take ſhame to themſelves, and own their Exceſſes and Exorbitances in their full Magnitude, judging themſelves that they might not be judged of the Lord. Theſe partial and favourable, lame and imperfect Confeſſions of Sin, when ſome little Part is owned, but much more is denied; when Fig-leaves and ſpecious Pretences are ſtudiouſly ſought out to cover as much of a Man's Shame as is poſſible, are ever an infallible Argument that the Sinner was never duly humbled for that Sin for which he hath ſtill ſo much Kindneſs and Affection.

2. Another thing obſervable is, that *Ezra*, and thoſe other holy Men, that

together with him made this Confeſſion, did impute all thoſe Miſeries and Calamities which they had ſuffered in the Captivity, unto their Sins: they did own their Sufferings as the Fruit of their Sins, and acknowledg their Tranſgreſſions to have been the meritorious Cauſe and Procurers of their Afflictions: *After all*, ſay they, *that is come upon us for our evil Deeds, and for our great Treſpaſs.* They were convinced, and did yield and aſſent that God's Intentions in bringing thoſe Evils upon them, were to puniſh them for their Sins. This Conviction and Acknowledgment was neceſſary for them, and is for us all in reference to our Afflictions; and yet 'tis very difficult to attain it. 'Tis neceſſary, becauſe without it we can neither be patient under our Afflictions, nor profit by them, nor rationally expect a good Iſſue out of them.

1*ſt.* Unleſs we be convinced that our Sufferings have relation to our Sins, and own them as the Fruits of our Sins, we ſhall hardly be able to undergo with Patience what is inflicted on us. To be ſure we ſhall want one of the moſt effectual Arguments to work Patience in us. 'Tis the Senſe of our Sins deſerving what-

whatſoever is come upon us, and an Acknowledgment of the righteous Hand of God in bringing ſuch Afflictions on us for our Sins, that humbles and ſubdues our Hearts to God, compoſeth and quieteth our tumultuous Spirits, and gives check to all the Riſings of our rebellious Nature againſt God's Providence. It was the Senſe that *Eli* had of his own Guilt, and of the juſt Deſert of his own Sin, and the Sins of his Family, that made him ſo patient, quiet and ſilent, when that heavy Sentence was by *Samuel* pronounced againſt him and his, as that he had not a Word to ſay more, than only to profeſs his humble and meek Submiſſion to the good Pleaſure of God; *It is the Lord*, ſaith he, *let him do what ſeemeth him good.* And this is that which the Spirit of God calls *the accepting of the Puniſhment of our Sins.* But if the Sinner be not convinced that he ſuffers for his Sins, and that his Tranſgreſſions have been the Procurers of his Afflictions, it cannot eaſily be but that his corrupt Nature ſhould rebel againſt God, and impatiently riſe up againſt his Providence as unequal, too rigorous & ſevere.

1 Sam. 3. 18.

Lev. 26. 41.

2*dly*. Neither can a Man profit by his Afflictions, unleſs he be convinced that his

his Sins have been the Cauſe of them, and that God ſtrikes at them in his Sufferings. Who can think himſelf concerned to amend and reform that, upon the account of his Afflictions, which he never diſcerned to be the Cauſe of them, nor can be convinced that they have any relation to it? But let a Man once be throughly apprehenſive of the Diſpleaſure of God againſt him for his particular Sins, and ſee the Hand of God in his Afflictions ſtriking at thoſe Sins, and then he will ſoon think himſelf highly concerned to rectify or remove out of the way that which hath done him ſo much Miſchief: He will think he cannot make too much haſte to quit and be rid of that for which he ſorely ſmarts already, and may yet ſmart more, unleſs by his ſpeedy Reformation he prevent it. When God had ſent a Plague among the Iſraelites for their murmuring, *Moſes* being deeply ſenſible of the fierce Wrath of God againſt them for that Sin, ſaith to *Aaron*, *Take a Cenſer, and put Fire therein from off the Altar, and put on Incenſe, and go quickly unto the Congregation, and make an Atonement for them; for there is Wrath gone out from the Lord, the Plague is begun. Go quick-*

Numb. 16. 46.

ly,

ly, ſaith he, *for Wrath is gone out from the Lord.* A lively Senſe of the Anger and Diſpleaſure of God in your Afflictions for your Sins, will ſpeed and quicken your Endeavours to make your Peace with God, by anſwering the End of his Corrections.

3dly. Neither can you rationally expect to be freed from your Afflictions in a way of Mercy, until they bring you to the Sight of your Sins, and you look upon them as the Puniſhment of Sin: For till that be done upon you, your Afflictions are wholly fruitleſs, as having done no part of that Work, for effecting of which God ſent them. To underſtand why you are afflicted, and to ſee the Sins which God ſtrikes at in your Afflictions, is the firſt Step towards God's attaining his End in afflicting you. If this be not done upon you, nothing is done. And therefore you have no Reaſon to expect the Removal of them, unleſs it be to make way for ſome other more ſmarting Rod, which may effectually work that in you which God intended. But though in theſe Reſpects it be moſt neceſſary to ſee and own our Sins as the Cauſe and Procurers of our Sufferings, yet to do it is as difficult as

'tis

'tis neceſſary. For ſuch is the Pride and Stubbornneſs of our Hearts, that we are not eaſily brought to take Shame to our ſelves, and to acknowledg our own particular Sins to have been the Cauſe of our Sufferings, ſaying to our ſelves as
Jer. 4. 18. God ſaith to *Jeruſalem, Thy VVay and thy Doings have procured theſe things unto thee.* We are very unwilling to acknowledg our own Guilt, and would much rather lay the Cauſe of our Sufferings at any other Door than our own. And this we are eſpecially apt to do in publick and common Calamities. Theſe we aſcribe:

(1.) To Chance or common Providence, in which we do not think our ſelves particularly touch'd or concern'd.

(2.) To the Wickedneſs of ſome malicious and miſchievous Inſtruments, that were the Contrivers and Cauſers of our Sufferings.

(3.) To the Sins of others: The Provocations of ſuch and ſuch profligate and abominable Perſons drew down the Judgments of God upon the Place, and not our own Offences. As for our ſelves, we ſuffered only in the Croud, and becauſe we were found among thoſe who were to be puniſhed. Or,

(4.) If

(4.) If we acknowledg our Sins in the general to have been the meritorious Cauſe of our Sufferings, yet we deſcend not to Particulars, we charge not our ſelves with ſuch and ſuch Sins for which God hath been angry with us. And ſo our owning our Sin only in general as the Cauſe of our Sufferings, is but a formal thing, with which we are little affected. 'Tis little better than if we had ſaid, We believe indeed that we have deſerved all that is come upon us, but we know not how nor wherein. *Ezra* no doubt went a great deal further; 'tis not to be queſtioned but that he had in his moſt paſſionate Confeſſions, an Eye upon the particular Sins for which they ſuffered in *Babylon*. We may be ſure they were not Generalities only that ſo deeply affected him: he had upon his Heart the particular Inſtances of their vile Provocations, together with the Circumſtances of them; and ſo muſt we if we deſire to be affected with God's terrible Providences as we ought, and to take them to Heart in a right manner. Though what I am now ſpeaking concerns us all, yet there may be thoſe amongſt us who may think themſelves very little concerned therein.

1. Thoſe

1. Thoſe who though they have been Sufferers together with others, yet have been free from all thoſe foul and enormous Offences and high Provocations which many others have been guilty of; and poſſibly over and above their being free from the Guilt and Stain of fouler Sins, they have been ſuch as have made a ſtricter Profeſſion of Religion than moſt others. Theſe Perſons may be very inclinable to think that God did not particularly intend the correcting of them for their Sins, in the common Judgment that lighted upon the Place, but that they ſuffer rather upon their Neighbours Account than their own.

2. Of the ſame Opinion perhaps may they be tempted to be, who ſeem even as to outward things, to have gained by their Afflictions, and to be in a better Condition, as to Trade, than they were in before. 'Tis eaſy for ſuch, if any ſuch be, to entertain themſelves with a pleaſant Dream, that God only emptied them to the end he might fill them fuller than they were before; and that he had no other Deſign in pulling down their Houſes, than that he might build them up fairer. But let neither the one nor the other deceive themſelves. They would

would but flatter themſelves, if they ſhould think that God did not aim at their Sins in his ſevere Providences, as well as at the Sins of their Neighbours.

As for the former of theſe, though they may have been free from the fouler Abominations and crying Sins of the Place; and though they may have made a ſtrict and high Profeſſion of Religion, yet even ſuch may have been tainted with the Pollution of many Sins which may have had no ſmall Influence in procuring the heavy Judgments of God upon the Town. And their Sins, in reſpect of their nearer relation to God, and ſtricter Profeſſion, may have reflected more Diſhonour upon the Name of God, than many of thoſe Sins in others, which have otherwiſe had much more Flagitiouſneſs and Enormity in them.

And as for the latter ſort, who may ſeem to have gained by their Loſſes: If that be the Condition of any amongſt us, let them not be too forward thence to conclude their Innocency. God may pull down in Anger, and wound in higheſt Diſpleaſure; and yet ſuch is his admirable Goodneſs and Compaſſion, that he may anon repent him of the Evils which he hath for our Sins moſt juſtly

juſtly brought upon us, and with Advantage rebuild what he had pulled down, and ſo fully heal the Wounds that he had made, as to leave us in a better Condition of Health and Strength than he found us in. God by the Prophet *Ezekiel* foretelling the Return of the Iſraelites from *Babylon*, and their Re-eſtabliſhment in their own Land, promiſed to ſettle them after their *old Eſtates, and to do better unto them than at their beginning*. Now what think you? Might they when God had made good this Promiſe, thence infer, that God was never angry with them for their Sins, and that their Sufferings in *Babylon* were never intended as their Puniſhment? Their Caſe may be yours: God hath, it may be, ſince the Fire, dealt better with you than at the beginning; you are in ſome Reſpects perhaps in a better Condition than formerly, perhaps your Trade is doubled: Will you therefore now wipe your Mouths, and ſay you were innocent; you never offended God ſo as to have had any Hand in procuring his Judgments to be poured out upon this Place? Far be it from you to draw ſuch a proud Concluſion from God's gracious Providence towards you.

Ezek. 36. 11.

Though

Though God hath not only built you up again, but adorned and beautified you, and advanced you to a more ſplendid Condition than before, yet ceaſe not you ſtill to acknowledge and give glory to the righteous hand of God in pulling you down, and emptying you. Amid all your preſent Mercies and Advantages, be you ſtill found putting your mouths in the duſt, loathing and abhorring your ſelves for your evil ways, and from your hearts profeſſing, That as you were moſt juſtly pluckt down, ſo you might ſtill as juſtly have lain in Ruins and Aſhes, and have been made perpetual Deſolations, as God once threatned the Land of the *Chaldæans*, a place never to be inhabited any more. Jer. 25. 12.

And ſo much concerning the ſecond thing obſervable from this firſt aggravation of their ſins.

The Third Particular thence obſervable, is, That to return to ſin after we have been ſeverely puniſhed for it, and grievouſly ſmarted for it, doth much heighten our ſin, and render it much more provoking in the ſight of God. This is clearly implied in the form of

ſpeech which *Ezra* uſeth ; *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great treſpaſs, ſhould we again break thy commandments?* As if he had ſaid, This were a provocation of an high nature; far be it from any of us to be guilty of it.

There are theſe three things that greaten and aggravate our ſins committed againſt God; and notwithſtanding former great Severities againſt thoſe our ſins.

1. To ſin again in the ſame kind, after that we had grievouſly ſmarted for ſin, argues a great degree of hardneſs of heart. The ſcalled Child dreads the fire; and the very bruit Beaſts are afraid of medling with that for which they have been ſoundly beaten. And were there any tenderneſs upon the heart of man, he would not again eaſily be drawn to venture on that which he hath already paid ſo dearly for.

2. It argues an heart ſtrongly ingaged to ſin, and deſperately bent after it, which no former Severities will reſtrain, or hold in It ſhews a man is mad in love with ſin, that will out after it whatever it coſt him. 'Tis as much as if he ſaid, 'Tis true, I have already taſted of

'of the bitter fruits of ſin; I can tell by 'experience what 'twill coſt me. But 'however, I muſt pleaſe my ſelf, I muſt 'gratify my ſinful deſires, my ſenſual 'and brutiſh Luſts, and I will, I am 'reſolved to do it, come what will 'of it.

3. It argues a ſlighting of the Anger and Diſpleaſure of the Almighty, and a contempt of his Rod. Herein a man's carriage towards God, is like that of a ſtubborn and incorrigible Child againſt him that chaſtens him. Though you make him ſmart, he cares not; correct him as long as you will, he is ſtill the ſame, and will do what he pleaſeth, do you what you will, or can, to reclaim him. Take heed of this aggravation of your ſins, you who have been Sufferers by the Fire, and all you who have any other way been ſeverely handled for your ſins. Beware how you have any more to do with thoſe ſins againſt which the fierce indignation of the Lord hath been ſo diſcovered, and his Word, as it were, revealed from Heaven. Keep at the greateſt diſtance from thoſe Sins; come not near the Borders or Confines of them; run away from all temptations to them.

And that you may be preſerved from them,

1. Labour to know what they be. 'Tis now a good while ſince the dreadful Fire; though you were then in a miſerable hurry, full of dread, diſtractions, and confuſions, ſo as you had ſcarce the command of your own thoughts; though then you had not ſo much ſedateneſs and compoſedneſs of ſpirit, nor ſo much freedom and liberty as to ſit down and conſider, as to reflect and enquire into your ſelf, as to call your ſelf to an account, and find out the cauſes of God's fierce Indignation, yet ſince you have had time enough to do it. Have you done it? Have you gotten a ſight of all thoſe your particular Sins, by which the Wrath of God had been ſo highly incenſed againſt you? If you have not, if this work hath ſo long been neglected, if to this day you have never ſet about it; if ſtill you be ſtrangers to the reaſons of God's contending with you, yet be now at length perſuaded to make a narrow ſearch after all thoſe Sins which have been the procurers of ſo much miſery to your ſelves, and this place.

2. Ha-

2. Having found out thoſe ſins, have them often in your thoughts; and if it be poſſible, carry always upon your heart the impreſſions of that terrible Judgment, at leaſt be ſure that you often call it to mind, and renew the lively remembrance of it, and labour to preſerve the images and repreſentations of all the diſmal circumſtances of it in your mind; and then ſay with *Ezra* here in the Text, *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great treſpaſs, ſhall we again break thy commandments?* So ſay in reference to all your particular ſins; your filthineſs and uncleanneſs, your drunkenneſs and ſwearing, your profanation of the Lord's Day and Ordinances, your pride and gallantry, your covetouſneſs and earthly-mindedneſs, your unconſcionable dealing, and your diſhoneſt methods and artifices in the managing of your Trades and particular Callings; your ſcant Meaſures, and deceitful Ballances; your mingling, adulterating and embaſing your Commodities to impoſe upon the Buyer, and inhance your gain; your allowing your ſelves in diſſimulation, and lying, and falſhood, for your advantage; your laying aſide the gol-

den Rule of our Saviour, and making no conſcience of dealing with others, as you deſire to be dealt with your ſelves; your ſeeking your ſelves, and your own things, with the diſregard of your Neighbours, and the neglect of the Publick good; your lukewarmneſs, coldneſs and indifferency in the things that concern the glory of God, and the common and great intereſts of this place; your not uſing your power, and the authority you are entruſted and armed with, for the due puniſhment of ſin, and the beating down and ſuppreſſing of vice; your unequal and partial dealing in the adminiſtration of Juſtice; your mutual animoſities, variances, envyings, emulations, and heart-burnings; I ſay, in reference to all theſe, ſo far as any of you may have been guilty of them, and in reference to all other ſins whatſoever which any of you may be convinced of as your own ſins by which you have contributed towards the drawing down of the late terrible Judgment of God upon this place; Say with *Ezra* in the Text, *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great treſpaſs, ſhould we again break thy commandments?* Should we again return to thoſe

thoſe our ſinful practiſes that have laid this place in aſhes, and made it a ruinous heap? That have made it a by-word, and a Proverb, a gazing-ſtock, and an hiſſing, and an aſtoniſhment to all that paſs by, and that have cauſed the ears of all to tingle that have heard but the rumour and report of what the righteous hand of God hath brought upon us? O let's never think of taking up our former ſins, and cloſing with them again, after that God hath thus declared his anger againſt us for them, and by ſuch terrible effects of higheſt diſpleaſure, done almoſt whatſoever could be done to imbitter them to us, and diſingage us from them.

But beſides all this, to ſet our hearts at a greater remoteneſs from thoſe ſins, let's alſo make uſe of thoſe other Conſiderations which this Scripture affords us.

2 Therefore though God hath ſeverely handled us, yet he *hath in wrath remembred mercy, and puniſhed us leſs than our iniquities deſerve.* If we take a true eſtimate of his dealings with us, we cannot chuſe but diſcern much lenity and moderation, much tenderneſs and compaſſion to have been mingled

with his ſeverity; and that in many reſpects.

1. He that turned your Houſes into aſhes and rubbiſh, and took away a great part of your ſubſtance, might have taken away all, and left you nothing.

2. He might by the ſame terrible Fire that deprived you of your Eſtate, have alſo deprived you of your Children and deareſt Relations. The loſs of one Child in ſuch a way of terrible Providence, would have troubled you more, and have gone nearer your heart than the loſs of all your Eſtate.

3. It might have been your own lot to have periſhed in the flames. God that mercifully ſpared you, and reſcued you from the violence of the fire, might by it have hurried you out of this World into Hell, and ſent you from one fire to another. This fire was terrible, but the unquenchable fire of Hell had been much more terrible.

4. Though you had eſcaped the fire, and been as a Brand pluckt out of the burning, yet ſuch impreſſions might the fright and danger you were in, have

left

left upon you, that you might have loſt the uſe of your Reaſon, and have been as a Child, or Ideot, all your days.

5. God might have made ſuch impreſſions of his Wrath upon your ſpirit by that terrible Judgment, as you might never have been rid of them, but have carried them to your Grave. You might have been not only a terror to your ſelf, but *Magor Miſſabib, a terror to all about you*, as long as you had lived. How mercifully and favourably hath God treated you amid his greateſt Severities, ſeeing none of theſe things have befallen you, or any of yours! O then go one ſtep further with *Ezra* in the Text, and ſay, *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great treſpaſs, and ſeeing thou haſt puniſhed us leſs than our iniquities deſerve, ſhould we again break thy commandments?*

3. God was not only pleaſed to deal mercifully and compaſſionately with you in that heavy ſtroke, *puniſhing you leſs than your iniquities deſerved; not ſtirring up all his wrath, nor ſuffering his whole diſpleaſure to ariſe*; but he hath alſo ſince been very gracious and fa-

favourable, kind and bountiful to you many ways.

1. Immediately upon that dreadful ſtroke, what rowlings of Bowels, and tender Compaſſions, did he cauſe in all the Countrey round about! What ſpeedy and plentiful Supplies in that difficult Seaſon, in that hour of your extream neceſſities, did God move the hearts of people to ſend you in from every quarter! Nobility, and Gentry, and Commonalty, Towns, and Villages in all the circuit round, ſtriving who ſhould do moſt for you, and whoſe Charity ſhould come moſt ſpeedily in for your preſent ſuccour and relief. What *Moſes* ſaith of that ſignal night in which God brought the Children of *Iſrael* out of *Egypt*, *It is a night much to be obſerved to the Lord, for bringing them out of the land of Egypt; this is that night of the Lord to be obſerved of all the children of Iſrael in their generations:* The ſame, or the like, may I ſay of that day of your diſtreſs, when God in ſuch a ſtrange manner touch'd the hearts of all ſorts of People with a tender ſenſe of your ſad and deplorable Condition, and ſo enlarged their hearts

Exod. 12. 42.

and

and hands towards you for your relief and ſupplies; 'tis a day much to be obſerved to the Lord to give him the glory of that mercy; 'tis that day which deſerves never to be forgotten by you, or yours.

2. How kind and gracious was God to you in the mild and favourable Winter-ſeaſon that followed, when many of the poorer ſort were even houſleſs and harbourleſs, and when generally the Fewel that People had laid in for the Winter, had been conſumed by the fire. What a gracious Providence of God towards you was it, That when you had neither warm Houſes, nor proviſion of Fewel to defend you from the injuries of an hard Winter, the Weather ſhould be ſo mild and temperate as the like had ſeldom been known; and that through his goodneſs to you, you ſhould leſs need thoſe helps and defences againſt the cold which God had then deprived you of! Should a ſevere and ſharp Winter have followed the Fire, it could ſcarce have been poſſible but that many muſt have periſhed before the Winter had been over.

3. What Aſſiſtances and large Contributions have you had throughout the King-

Kingdom towards the recruiting of your Loſſes, and the re-building of the Town! Though ſome miſcarriages and loſs there may have been in managing the Collections, and though all that you have received, bears not that proportion to your Sufferings and Loſſes which ſome have conceived it did; yet, I believe, there was never any inſtance of any Town in *England* burnt, or ruined, for which ſo large Collections have been made. So exceedingly, and almoſt univerſally throughout the Kingdom did God ſtir up, and open the hearts of people to commiſerate your Condition. God, *who hath the hearts of all men in his hand, and turneth them as the rivers of water whitherſoever he pleaſeth*, hath ſo toucht the hearts of Prince and People, City and Countrey, that all have contributed their aſſiſtances in an extraordinary and eminent manner towards your reſtauration. And as for the King's favour and bounty towards you, it hath been very ſignal ſeveral ways; the Inſtances whereof are very well known, and muſt for ever be remembred, ſetting aſide *London* the *Metropolis* of the Kingdom, I think he never did ſo much for any diſtreſſed

Town

Town in his Dominions, as for this. In all which you muſt look to God, and acknowledge him as your great Benefactor.

4. Through the favour of God, and the great helps you have had from thoſe inſtruments of your good which he hath raiſed up, the Town is now in a fair way of being rebuilt, and of being improved and advanced to a greater degree of luſtre and beauty, than ever it had before the fire: And moreover many of you, I hope, moſt of you, are in a good way of imployment, and livelihood, the Trade of the Town beginning to recover together with the Building.

5. It hath alſo pleaſed God to add another Bleſſing that ſweetens all your other Mercies, and gives you the comfortable enjoyment of them, and that is Health. There were great and juſt fears leſt the ſtraitneſs and inconvenience of poor Houſes, and narrow Rooms, into which, for want of better Accommodations, ſeveral Families were ſometimes enforced to crowd, might have occaſioned ſome Epidemical Diſeaſe in the Town; but in this alſo the wonderful goodneſs of God to the

Town

Town hath appeared, there having hardly ever been known ſo long a Seaſon of ſo much health in the Town as ſince the Fire.

6. There is yet one thing more that crowns all your Mercies, and that is, That God affords you his Goſpel; a Mercy, which of it ſelf alone were enough to make you ample amends for all your Sufferings, though God ſhould ſtrip you of all other Comforts,

Iſa. 30.20. *and give you only the bread of adverſity, and the water of affliction.*

Now then, God having done all this for you; having raiſed you out of the duſt, and ſet you upon your feet once more, and loaded you with ſo many Favours; what remains but that now you add what *Ezra* further adds in the Text, and ſay full out with him, *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great treſpaſs*; ſeeing thou our God haſt puniſhed us leſs than our iniquities deſerve, and haſt given us ſuch a deliverance as this, *ſhould we again break thy commandments? Wouldeſt thou not be angry with us till thou hadſt conſumed us, ſo that there ſhould be no remnant, nor eſcaping?* I beſeech you

let

let us all labour to ſay ſo from our very hearts, and with the ſame holy indignation againſt our ſins, and ſtrength of reſolution to forſake them, as he did; and then he that hath begun to do us good, and carried on his work of mercy thus far, will no doubt perfect it to his own glory, and our comfort.

But ſeeing our danger is ſo great, if we return to our folly after ſuch terrible Judgments, and ſignal Mercies, give me leave to caution you againſt ſome of thoſe ſins which we are moſt in danger of.

1. Now that your Town begins to riſe again with greater beauty and luſtre, take heed of being lifted up. *Be not high-minded, but fear,* leſt for your ſins God lay you low, and level you with the ground once more. You know what *Solomon* ſaith, *Pride goeth before deſtruction, and an haughty ſpirit before a fall.* Prov. 16 18. The odious ſin of Pride hath formerly been imputed to this place. And doth it not begin to bud again, as the *Prophet* ſpeaks, *notwithſtanding all that God hath done to humble us?* If it do not, what means our apparrelling our ſelves above our rank and quality? what means

means our forwardneſs to come as near as we can to every vain Faſhion, and immodeſt Dreſs, which our looſe times have taken up? How is it that we cannot content our ſelves with ſuch comely Apparrel, and modeſt Dreſſes, as become a People that have not long ſince been among the pots, and lain in the aſhes; and whereby we might be Patterns of modeſty and ſobriety to others?

2. Take heed of making too much haſte to recover and repair your Loſſes by any unlawful Artifices, or unjuſtifiable Methods of gain. *Solomon* again hath taught us, *That he who maketh haſt to be rich, ſhall not be innocent.*

Prov. 28. 20.

(1.) Take heed of ſetting unreaſonable Prizes upon your Commodities. Do not ſo far deceive your ſelves, as to think your Loſſes now juſtify you in demanding what Rates you pleaſe. That were a very ill uſe of that heavy Judgment that hath been upon you. Content your ſelves with moderate gain; ſo ſhall you riſe again more ſurely, though more ſlowly.

(2.) Take heed of dealing hardly with the Poor, and oppreſſing them in thoſe ways

ways in which you make uſe of them. Let them have what is fit, and pay them well for their labour. Though your own gain for the preſent may be ſomewhat the leſs, yet both your Comfort and the Bleſſing of God upon what you have, will be ſo much the greater. Never think your ſelf a loſer by uſing a poor man well, and giving him with the moſt, rather than with the leaſt, for the ſervice he doth you.

3. As for you, whoſe Calling lies in giving entertainment to others.

1. Take heed that you for your advantage make not your ſelves partakers of other mens ſins, by entertaining idle and intemperate perſons at unſeaſonable hours, or by giving them more drink than is fit. This were the ready way to debauch the Town, and draw upon you the Curſes of thoſe Families that may be ready to ſtarve at home, while bad Husbands loſe their time, and miſpend their Money in your Houſes, by which their Relations ſhould be ſupported. Can you think that what is thus gained, will ever proſper with you? Would it not bring the Curſe of God upon all that you have?

2. Above all, take heed of making your Houſes the harbour and rendezvouz of leud and filthy Perſons. Hath God for the ſins of *Sodom* inflicted the Judgment of *Sodom* upon you; and dare any ſet up, and carry on the ſame trade again in contempt of God, and in open defiance of his Judgments? If ſuch impudent and daring Sinners ſhould be ſtill found amongſt us, it were enough to ſet the Town on a light flame once more. Let ſuch perſons tremble to think what awaits them, if nothing will reform them.

Laſtly, Be you all in general perſuaded to lay aſide your mutual Animoſities and Contentions, which have been, and ſtill are, the great reproach of this place; *Be kindly affectionate one towards another, with brotherly love*, as the *Apoſtle* exhorts. *Be all of one mind, ſtudy peace, and the things that make for peace. Live in peace, and the God of peace and love ſhall be with you.*

The

The Eleventh Sermon.

Hag. II. 6, 7, 8, 9.

Thus ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth, and the ſea, and the dry land: And I will ſhake all nations, and the deſire of all nations ſhall come, and I will fill this houſe with glory, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts. The ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts. The glory of this latter houſe ſhall be greater than of the former, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts: and in this place will I give peace, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts.

The First Sermon Preached in the New Church at Northampton *Rebuilt after the Fire.*

When God turned the Captivity of his People, brought them out of *Babylon*, and once more ſettled them in the Promiſed Land, they for a time wholly minded their own private Intereſts and Concernments; but the publick Worſhip of God, as if that had

been no man's concern, was no man's care. The ſettling of their own Affairs, and the building and beautifying of their own Houſes ſo took them up, that the building of the Houſe of God was little regarded. It was long before this work was begun; and after it was begun, and ſome progreſs had been made therein, it met with ſeveral difficulties and interruptions, and went on very ſlowly, as for the moſt part Church-work doth. Two great obſtructions there were that did not a little retard and ſet back this work, the one from without, the other from within.

1. The Enemies from without, omitted no endeavours, left no Stone unturned, whereby they might hinder the building of the Temple. And what by their own Power, what by their Intereſt in the *Perſian* Court, they ſo far prevailed as to put divers ſtops to the work.

2. The obſtruction from within, was their lukewarmneſs and indifferency, their want of Zeal and forwardneſs for promoting and carrying on the work. Now as well for their encouragement againſt the Enemy, as for rouſing them up

up and exciting them to more Zeal and Activity in promoting a work in which the honour of God and the happineſs of that people were ſo much concerned, God was pleaſed to raiſe up and imploy two extraordinary Perſons, the Prophet *Haggai* and the Prophet *Zechary*. The Prophet *Haggai* having reproved them for their ſlackneſs and negligence, for their minding their own private Intereſts and Affairs with the neglect of what referred to the honour and publick worſhip of God; and having laid before them the ſeveral Judgments which for this their Sin God had inflicted on them, doth aſſure them of God's gracious preſence, aſſiſtance, and bleſſing in this weighty undertaking, if they ſhould in good earneſt engage therein, and purſue it with that Zeal, Vigour, and Induſtry, which in the managing and carrying on of ſo important an Affair was requiſite. Now to the end that all objections againſt it might be anſwered, and whatſoever was or could be matter of diſcouragement might be removed, the Prophet in the words that I have read, doth meet with the principal things which carnal Reaſon might pitch upon, and

make uſe of for the cooling of their Zeal, the rebating of their Induſtry, and the ſlackning of their Endeavours. Were the Adverſaries and Oppoſers of this work numerous and potent? How many and how potent ſoever they were, the Lord of Hoſts would be with his People, and ſtand by them. He would exert and put forth his Almighty Power in the behalf of them; he would ſhake the Heavens, and the Earth, and the Sea, and the dry Land. He would make all things give way to, yield, and ſtoop to his deſign; and rather than any thing ſhould hinder the accompliſhment of what he had undertaken to do for his People, he would turn the World upſide down. Now upon their late return from Seventy years Captivity in *Babylon*, was their outward condition ſtrait, poor and low? Were they altogether unfurniſhed with thoſe rich ſupplies which were neceſſary for carrying on ſo coſtly a work? That this might not trouble or diſhearten them, God tells them the Silver is his, and the Gold is his. He had all the Riches of the World at command, and could plentifully furniſh and ſupply them, if he ſaw good. Now that the platform

of

of the Houſe was drawn out, and the Foundations of it were laid, did the meanneſs of it diſcourage them? Did it ſeem a poor and contemptible thing in compariſon of *Solomon*'s Temple? How mean and deſpicable ſoever it might be in the eyes of any of them, and how far ſhort ſoever it was likely to be of the Splendor and Magnificence of *Solomon*'s Temple, yet God promiſeth to fill that Houſe with Glory, and that the Glory of that latter Houſe ſhould be greater than the Glory of the former. Were the frequent commotions and changes of the World, and the inconſtant and variable ſtate of things in thoſe parts of the World ſuch as promiſed them little quiet and ſatisfaction in the enjoyment of God's publick worſhip when the Temple ſhould be finiſhed? For allaying of theſe their fears, as the cloſe of all that God had promiſed, he tells them, that he would give peace in that place. And in regard that theſe were great things, and ſuch as an oppreſſed people that had been long under hatches, and had but of late begun to put up their Heads, could not eaſily belive; God ingageth his Omnipotency and Faithfulneſs for the performance of them, with-

in the compaſs of four verſes five times repeating that ſolemn form of words, *Thus ſaith the Lord of Hoſts.*

So I have given you the main Intendment and Scope of theſe words. In the handling of them, I muſt take them in order as they lye. And becauſe there are many things contained in them, which might take up ſome Hours if they were treated of at large, I muſt with all convenient brevity ſpeak to Particulars, and paſs on from one thing to another as lightly and ſpeedily as I can. But as I go on, where the matter will admit of it, and as far as it ſhall be capable thereof, I ſhall endeavour to bring it as near the preſent occaſion as I may.

Though the words will ſcarce admit of any genuine, proper, and convenient diviſion, yet ſuch a diviſion as they are capable of, you may thus take.

1. We have a prediction of great concuſſions and ſhakings in the World before the coming of the Meſſiah: *Yet once, it is a little while, and I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth, and the ſea, and the dry land, and will ſhake all nations.*

2. We

2. We have a Prediction of his coming: *And the desire of all nations shall come.*

3. A Promise of the Glory of the second Temple, together with an answer to an objection against it: *And I will fill this house with glory: the silver is mine, and the gold is mine.*

4. An Amplification of that Promise concerning the glory of the second Temple: *The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the glory of the former.*

5. An additional Promise of Peace, as an Appendix to all other Mercies promised: *And in this place will I give peace.*

6. The Ratification or Confirmation of the whole, in those last words, *saith the Lord of Hosts*, so often mentioned before, and with which all that was before promised, is at last shut up and sealed.

To begin with the first of these, the Prediction of great concussions and shakings in the World before the coming of the Messiah; *It is yet a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and will shake all nations.* By these Metaphorical Expressions, according to the usual Lan-

Language and Style of the Prophets, we are to underſtand great Troubles, Commotions, Changes and Alterations in the World, in which high and low, Perſons of all Conditions, Ranks and Qualities, repreſented by the Heavens and the Earth, ſhould take their turns, and have their ſhare. So God ſpeaking of his terrible Judgments on the World, ſaith, *I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth ſhall remove out of its place in the wrath of the Lord of Hoſts, and in the day of his fierce anger.* But now all the difficulty is, what ſhakings ſhould be here intended. Some underſtand the words of the great things which the Evangeliſts report to have been done at and upon the Birth of Chriſt, the Miracles wrought by him in his Life, the ſtrange and miraculous Providences at his Death and Reſurrection; and of the ſhaking of the World afterwards by the preaching of the Goſpel, whereby Idols were thrown down, Heatheniſh Idolatry and Superſtitions were aboliſhed; the Chriſtian Religion, and the Worſhip of the true God coming in place thereof. Theſe were great and wonderful things; but how they ſhould be here by the Prophet intended, is not eaſie to conceive.

Iſa. 13.13.

ceive. For he ſeems to ſpeak of ſuch concuſſions and ſhakings as ſhould be antecedent to the coming of Chriſt, and go before it, not concur with it, much leſs follow after it. *Thus ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth, and the ſea, and the dry land: and I will ſhake all nations, and the Deſire of all nations ſhall come*; that is, after God ſhould thus have ſhaken the World, Chriſt ſhould come. And indeed very great and dreadful ſhakings there were between the time of this Prophecy, and the coming of the Meſſiah; in which ſhakings the people of God, the *Jewiſh* Nation, were not a little concern'd. The *Perſian* Empire, under which they now were, was not only ſhaken, but ſhaken in pieces, diſſolved and ruined by the *Grecians* under the Conduct of *Alexander the Great*. Then preſently after *Alexander*'s Death, who died in the flower of his Age, the Empire which he had but juſt then acquired and been poſſeſſed of, was in effect once more rent in pieces, and divided amongſt his Chieftains and Principal Commanders. While this ſtate of things continued, the *Jews* were miſerably ſhaken, oppreſſed, and haraſſed by the Tyranny

Tyranny and Cruelty of *Antiochus Epiphanes*, beſides many other grievous preſſures and ſufferings, which during the Government of the *Seleucides* they underwent. After ſome time the *Romans* came upon them all, and ſubdued all to themſelves; in which Revolution the diſtreſſed *Jews* fell under the power of the *Romans*, and were at their Mercy. After all theſe terrible ſhakings, nearer the coming of Chriſt, the Civil Wars under *Auguſtus Cæſar*, cauſed horrible ſhakings and convulſions in the Empire; after which the Temple of *Janus* was ſhut up, and a peaceable time enſued, all Swords being ſheathed, and all Arms laid aſide throughout the whole Empire; and then was Chriſt the Prince of Peace born in the Forty firſt, or as ſome will have it, in the Forty ſecond year of the Reign of *Auguſtus Cæſar*.

Now whereas all theſe ſhakings were to go before the coming of Chriſt, which was the greateſt Mercy that ever was vouchſafed the World, we may obſerve,

That great Troubles and Afflictions ſometimes go before and make way for great and ſignal Mercies. This is indeed

deed the ordinary and uſual method of God's moſt wiſe and gracious Providence.

Thus *Joſeph* is ſold to the *Midianites*, carried into *Egypt*, and there again ſold to *Potiphar*, falſly accuſed, caſt into Priſon, and laid in Irons, that by this Series of long-continued Afflictions way might be made for his Advancement to the higheſt Honour in *Pharaoh*'s Court, and for his being made Ruler over all the Land of *Egypt*.

Thus ſeventy years Captivity and Bondage in *Babylon* goes before the joyful and triumphant Return of God's people into their own Land, of which the Pſalmiſt thus ſpeaks, *When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream: then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with ſinging: then ſaid they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them.* Pſal. 126. 1, 2. Which *Pſalm*, though placed among the *Pſalms* of *David*, yet is by Learned men, upon good grounds, ſuppoſed to have been penned by ſome other Perſon after the return from *Babylon*; as alſo *Pſal.* 137. that is to ſay, 460 years at leaſt after that *David* had been gathered to his Fathers; and perhaps much more,

more, for we know not how long after the return from *Babylon* it might be penned.

Thus the Ten moſt Cruel and Bloody Perſecutions of the Chriſtian Church in the firſt Ages thereof, went before that quiet and tranquillity which the Church enjoyed under *Conſtantine* and the ſucceeding Chriſtian Emperors, when, to uſe the expreſſions of the Prophet, *God made the peace of his Church as a river, and the righteouſneſs thereof as the waves of the ſea.*

Thus that wicked Uſurpation and Tyranny of Antichriſt, making havock of the Church, which hath been drawn out to ſo great a length already, and yet we know not how much longer it may laſt, goes before that happy eſtate of the Church, and of the World, when thoſe joyful Acclamations ſhall be heard, *The kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Chriſt*, Rev. 11. 15. And when they who ſhall have gotten *the victory over the beaſt and over his image, ſhall ſing the ſong of Moſes and of the Lamb, ſaying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, juſt and true are thy ways, thou king of ſaints*, Rev. 15. 1, 2. And to add but one

one inſtance more here at home; thus after the ſharp and bitter Perſecutions under the Reign of Queen *Mary*, followed that bleſſed Sunſhine of the Goſpel, and the peaceable and undiſturbed Enjoyment thereof throughout all the long and proſperous, or rather glorious Reign of Queen *Elizabeth*, and the continuance of it to us ever ſince, even to this day, notwithſtanding all the deſtructive Machinations, wicked Plots, and reſtleſs Attempts of the Enemy to deprive us of it, and to put out our light in obſcure darkneſs.

Now ſome of the reaſons of this method of Divine Providence are theſe.

1. It conduceth very much to the diſplaying and illuſtrating of the glory of God's Wiſdom, Power and Goodneſs, who can ſo wonderfully change the moſt dark and diſmal ſtate of things, *who creates darkneſs, and forms light*, Iſa. 45. 7. *Who turns the ſhadow of death into the morning*, as the Prophet ſpeaks, *Amos* 5. 8. Who turns a Town into Aſhes and Rubbiſh in the ſpace of few Hours, making it a place meet for *Zim* and *Ohim* to take up their abode in, the mercileſs Element where it raged ſcarce leaving

leaving a Lintel for the Cormorant or Bittern to lodge in, or the remainders of a ſcorched Window to ſing in: And then again within the ſpace of few years, out of the Duſt and Aſhes to raiſe up a Town for the Accommodation of men, and a Church for the Service of God, and both with the addition of that beauty and luſtre which had never been, unleſs God had laid the Foundations of that change for the better in ruin and deſolation. All Beholders muſt needs acknowledge ſuch admirable turns and viciſſitudes of things, to be the operation of his Hands, who is wonderful in counſel, and excellent in working.

2. By dark Providences, by Troubles and Afflictions, God fits and prepares us for Mercies. Our Afflictions when ſanctified, humble us, lay us low, make us reflect upon our ſelves, and conſider our ways; make us repent, reform, and turn to him that ſmiteth us; and all this tends to the rendring us meet to be partakers of the Mercies which God hath in ſtore for us. For while we go on impenitently in a courſe of Sin, bleſſings would be curſed to us, and abuſe of Mercies would increaſe our miſery.

3. Af-

3. Afflictions commend God's after-mercies, and make them more ſweet and acceptable to us, as the darkneſs of the Night commends the light of the Morning. A quiet and calm Seaſon after a Storm, how welcome, how pleaſant and delightſome is it! Such is the unſpeakable goodneſs of God, that he ſo much conſults our comfort, as to order and diſpoſe of the circumſtances of our Mercies, ſo as they may afford us moſt content and ſatisfaction.

4. Great Troubles and Afflictions going before great Mercies, diſpoſe our Hearts to greater thankfulneſs for them. When Mercies come in upon us in ſuch a ſeaſon, and with ſuch circumſtances, they greatly affect us, and make deep impreſſions on our Hearts, ſo as we think we can never be thankful enough, we can never bleſs God ſufficiently for them.

Now to apply this briefly; The conſideration of what hath been ſaid concerning this method of God's Providence, and the Reaſons of it, ſhould perſwade us, and prevail with us to bear Afflictions meekly, quietly, and patiently, and with that compoſedneſs,

calmneſs, and evenneſs of Spirit which becomes Chriſtians, who are no ſtrangers to the uſual ways of God's Providence, neither fretting againſt the Lord, nor deſponding, or caſting away our confidence in him. Though it be night with you at preſent, yet you may hope it will not be ſo always, the day will return. There is an interchangeable viciſſitude of theſe Providences; after darkneſs light breaks forth; and the longer your night hath been, the nearer are the approaches of the day; wherefore in the moſt dark and diſconſolate condition ſay with the Church of God, *I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my ſalvation. Rejoice not againſt me, O mine enemy, when I fall, I ſhall ariſe; when I ſit in darkneſs, the Lord ſhall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, becauſe I have ſinned againſt him, until he plead my cauſe, and execute judgment for me; he will bring me forth to the light, and I ſhall behold his righteouſneſs.*

Mic. 7. 7, 8, 9.

So I have done with the firſt thing, the Prediction of great concuſſions and ſhakings in the World before the coming of the Meſſiah.

2. I come now to the ſecond Particular, The Promiſe of his coming, *And the deſire of all nations ſhall come.* The Deſire of all Nations, that is Chriſt the object of the deſire of all Nations, or whom all Nations ſhall deſire. But then this muſt be underſtood of ſome of all Nations, of as many out of all Nations as are diſpoſed to receive him; though others, perhaps the generality of ſome Nations, may be ſo far from deſiring him, that they may hate him, blaſpheme his Name, and perſecute to the Death all that acknowledge him for their Saviour. But if this ſenſe be judged too ſtrait, then by the deſire of all Nations we may underſtand the deſireable of all Nations, or he who hath that in him which ſhould render him lovely and deſirable to all Nations, and in reſpect whereof all Nations may and ſhould deſire him; and ſo far as they know him, and underſtand their own intereſt, will deſire him. This deſcription or character of Chriſt is agreeable to what the Scriptures elſewhere ſay concerning him. The Spouſe having deſcribed him, and ſet forth his Perfections and Excellencies, ſaith, *He is the chiefeſt among ten thouſand*, Cant.

5. 10. *And altogether lovely*, ver. 16. And *Jacob* Prophetically ſpeaking of him under the Name of *Shiloh*, ſaith, *To him ſhall the gathering of the people be*, Gen. 49. 10. That is, all People and Nations out of an high eſteem of him, and an earneſt deſire after him, ſhall flow in to him. So God ſpeaking of the coming in of the *Gentiles* to the Church in the Times of the Goſpel, and under the Kingdom of the Meſſiah, ſaith, *Behold, I will lift up my hand to the Gentiles, and ſet up my ſtandard to the people, and they ſhall bring thy ſons in their arms, and thy daughters ſhall be carried upon their ſhoulders*, Iſa. 49. 22. *In that day there ſhall be a root of Jeſſe, which ſhall ſtand for an enſign to the people; to it ſhall the Gentiles ſeek*, Iſa. 11. 10. *Behold my ſervant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my ſoul delighteth; I have put my ſpirit upon him, he ſhall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. I will give him for a Covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles*, Iſa. 42. 1. *It is a light thing that thou ſhouldſt be my ſervant to raiſe up the tribes of Jacob, and to reſtore the preſerved of Iſrael; I will alſo give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayeſt be*

my ſalvation to the ends of the earth, Iſa. 49. 6. Hence it is that the Church gathered out of all Nations, is repreſented to St. *John* in a Viſion as giving glory to Chriſt. *I beheld*, ſaith he, *and lo a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, ſtood before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands, and cryed with a loud voice, ſaying, Salvation to our God which ſitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb*, Rev. 7. 9, 10.

Now if you ask in what reſpects, and upon what account Chriſt is the deſire of all Nations? I anſwer, this is a ſubject which would take up much time if I ſhould enlarge on it. Briefly therefore, he is the deſire of all Nations, becauſe he is the promiſed *ſeed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be bleſſed*, Gen. 22. 18. Becauſe he is the Saviour of all Nations, *the ſaviour of the w rld*, John 4. 42. *The propitiation for the ſins of the whole world*, 1 John 2. 2. *There being no other name under heaven given among men whereby we muſt be ſaved*, Acts 4. 12. In ſhort, he it is that ſatisfieth the Juſtice of God for Sinners, and delivers them from the w rath to

come, that purchaſeth for them pardon of ſin, peace with God, Grace here, and Glory hereafter. In a word, this is he *who is of God made unto us wiſdom, righteouſneſs, ſanctification and redemption*, 1 Cor. 1. 30. Now let us all reflect upon our ſelves, and conſider whether he who is the deſire of all Nations, be the deſire of our Souls; and whether he be in our eſteem the chiefeſt among ten thouſand. Do we *count all things loſs and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt?* Do we intirely love him? Do we earneſtly long after him? Are our Affections towards him ſuch as we can never be ſatisfied until we can ſay that he is ours, and we are his? Could we be content to purchaſe him at any rate? And is there nothing in all the World ſo dear unto us, but that we could freely part with it for his ſake? O let us never be at reſt until we find that our Hearts ſtand thus affected towards him. What ſay you to this, all ye that have the Name of Chriſt frequently in your Mouths, and by an external Profeſſion own him as your Saviour, but ſay of him in your Hearts, *We will not have this man to reign over us?* Ye that give him good words, but refuſe

fuſe to take his Yoke upon you, and ſubmit to his Government; who profeſs you know him, love him, deſire him, and give him the chief room in your Hearts, but in your works deny him, being abominable, diſobedient, and to every good work reprobate. Deceive not your ſelves, Chriſt will never own ſuch as you are. Without timely and ſincere Repentance, the ſentence which you muſt expect from him is, *Depart from me, ye that work iniquity, I never knew you*, Mat. 7. 23.

Hitherto of the Character of Chriſt. Now as to the Promiſe of his coming; all that I ſhall therein take notice of, is the circumſtance of time, when he was to come, namely, while the ſecond Temple ſhould be yet ſtanding; for he was by his preſence to fill that Houſe with Glory, and to make the Glory of the latter Houſe greater than that of the former, as we ſhall preſently ſee. And this circumſtance of his coming, is that which alſo the Prophet *Malachy*, who propheſied immediately before his coming, foretold. *Behold*, ſaith the Meſſiah himſelf, *I ſend my meſſenger*, (that is, *John the Baptiſt*, the forerunner of

Chriſt) *and he ſhall prepare the way before me*; *and the Lord whom ye ſeek* (namely the Lord Chriſt) *ſhall ſuddenly come to his temple, even the meſſenger of the Covenant whom ye delight in.* This, as it confutes the unbelieving and blaſphemous *Jews*, and argues the wilful blindneſs of their minds, and the miſerable obſtinacy and hardneſs of their hearts in denying the Meſſiah to be come, and ſtill fixing new periods of time for his coming, as they find ſtill that he comes not at the times by them aſſigned him for his coming; ſo it greatly confirms our Faith in Chriſt as the true Meſſiah. For as all other things propheſied and foretold concerning the Meſſiah exactly agree to him and none elſe; ſo doth this remarkable circumſtance of the time of his coming.

Mal. 3. 1.

Wherefore the Apoſtle ſaith, *When the fulneſs of time was come, God ſent his Son into the world, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law*, Gal. 4. 4, 5. *When the fulneſs of time was come*, that is, when the time which God had predetermined and foretold was fully come. This is that which *Jacob* propheſied of, *Gen.* 49, 10. *The ſcepter ſhall not depart from Judah*,

Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come. Though the *Jews* had now ever ſince the Conqueſt of *Judea* by *Pompey*, been under the Power of the *Romans*; and by them been deprived of all power to judge, determine, and puniſh in Capital Matters; yet in other matters they had ſtill a power allowed them, ſo as all Government was not wholly wreſted away from them, and taken out of their hands. But now the time was drawing near when their City and Temple were to be utterly deſtroyed; their Polity, Civil State, and Commonwealth to be aboliſhed, the remainders of them, after the fatal ſlaughters of that miſerable people at the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, to be diſperſed and ſcattered into ſeveral Countreys, and not as much as the face or ſhadow of any Government to be left among them. At this ſignal and critical time, when the day of theſe their Calamities haſtened, was Chriſt born. The ſum of all is this, The Meſſiah was to come while the ſecond Temple was yet ſtanding, and while the Scepter was not yet wholly departed from *Judah*, not a Lawgiver from between his feet; while at leaſt ſomewhat of Civil Power and Government ſtill remain'd among them;

and

and ſo accordingly he came. But 'tis now above ſixteen hundred years ſince the Temple was deſtroyed, and all Civil Government among them, into what quarters of the World ſoever ſcattered, perfectly aboliſhed. In vain therefore do the *Jews* expect any other Meſſiah; and as for us Chriſtians, we have all imaginable evidence that Jeſus, the Son of the Bleſſed Virgin *Mary*, is the Chriſt, the promiſed Meſſiah. To him therefore let us betake our ſelves for the pardon of our Sins, and the ſalvation of our Souls; on him let us reſt, to him let us ſecurely commit the Everlaſting Concernments of our Souls. *Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jeſus Chriſt*, 1 Cor. 3. 11. *If an angel from heaven preach any other goſpel*, take upon him to hold forth any other Meſſiah, or to declare any other way of ſalvation, *let him be accurſed*, Gal. 1. 8.

3. Now follows the third Particular, A Promiſe of the glory of the ſecond Temple, together with the anſwer of an objection againſt it; *I will fill this houſe with glory; the ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine. I will fill this houſe with glory*, that's the Promiſe. In which words there ſeems to be a double Alluſion; partly an Alluſion to the external glory of *Solomon*'s Temple

Temple that was ſo magnificently built, and ſo richly beautified and adorned; and partly to the glorious appearance of God in that Temple, at the dedication thereof, concerning which we read, 1 *Kings* 8. 10, 11. *That a cloud filled the houſe of the Lord, ſo that the prieſts could not ſtand to miniſter becauſe of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the houſe.* So then, as the firſt Temple was filled with glory, ſo God promiſed the ſecond ſhould alſo be. But now what glory is here meant, and how this Promiſe was fulfilled, I ſhall preſently ſhew when I come to ſpeak of the Amplification of the Promiſe. For the preſent it is enough to know that God undertakes it, who can do whatſoever he pleaſeth, and will do whatſoever he hath promiſed. But however carnal reaſon objects, How can theſe things be? Where is the Silver and the Gold? Where are the rich materials wherewith this Houſe ſhall be ſo ſplendidly rebuilt? To this tacit objection that might be in the minds of that oppreſſed and indigent people, God anſwers, *The ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine.* As if he had ſaid, If I undertake to fill this Houſe with glory, make you no queſtion but that I ſhall find means for effecting it.

And was there not a time when the

the objection of this people was, or might have been ours? He that had ſeen this Town, and the place in which now we are aſſembled, the next morning after the dreadful Fire, would have deſpaired of living to ſee it rebuilt as now it is; he would rather have thought that the ſentence pronounced againſt *Moab* had belonged to it, that it ſhould be for *the breeding of nettles and ſalt-pits, and a perpetual deſolation.* If there had been any Prophet then among us that could have ſaid, Out of theſe Aſhes and ruinous heaps ſhall a Town and a Church be raiſed within the ſpace of a few years, and you ſhall ſee it more beautiful and ſplendid than ever it was before the Fire, the reply would have been, Where is the Silver, and where is the Gold wherewith it ſhall be done? Whence ſhall the diſtreſſed and impoveriſhed Inhabitants have wherewithal to compaſs it? But bleſſed be God, who hath found out means, and afforded helps to bring it to paſs. He who ſaith, *The ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine*; he who hath the *treaſures of darkneſs, and the hidden riches of ſecret places at his diſpoſal*, as he ſpeaks, hath inclined the Hearts of Prince and People, of Nobility and Gentry, of City and Country, to lend their aſſiſtance to-

Zeph. 2. 9.

Iſa. 45. 3.

wards

wards in such a full stream of bounty, as scarce admits of any parallel. But to the King's Bounty and Munificence do we in a more eminent and singular manner under God owe the Rebuilding of the Town and the Church, and more especially of the Church, which as long as it continues in being, will be a standing Monument thereof. As we must with all thankfulness acknowledge our deep obligations to all from the highest to the lowest that have been Instruments of our good, and particularly to the Gentlemen the Commissioners, by whose care and industry this place for the publick Worship and Service of God hath at length been perfected; so must we give God all the glory, who sets all Instruments a-work, who hath the hearts of all men in his hand as the *rivers of waters, and turneth them whithersoever he will.* Who said of *Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure*; even saying to *Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, thy foundations shall be laid.* Prov. 21. 1. Isa. 44. 28.

So I go on to the fourth Particular, the Amplification of the Promise; *And the glory of this latter house shall be greater than the glory of the former.* If these words should be understood of outward glory, it would be hard to shew how

the

the Promise was fulfilled. We read that
Ezr. 3.12. when the Priests and *Levites*, and the chief of the Fathers, who were ancient men that had seen the former House, saw the Foundation of the second Temple laid before their eyes, they wept with a loud voice, considering how short the latter House came of the former.
Hag 2.3. *Who is there among you*, said the Lord, *that saw this house in her first glory? And how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?* So then clear it is, that *Zerobabel*'s Temple as to the Structure and outward Ornaments thereof, was no way comparable to *Solomon*'s Temple. Some indeed say, that this Temple was so far enlarged and beautified by *Herod*, that it did not only equal, but exceed *Solomon*'s Temple. That *Herod* enlarg'd and beautifi'd it, is granted, but that he so improved it as it excelled *Solomon*'s Temple, may very well be questioned. It is therefore another kind of glory than that which consists in external lustre and magnificence, a spiritual glory that God intended when he promised, that *the glory of the latter house should be greater than the glory of the former.* And that spiritual glory lay especially in this, that the promised Messiah, the Eternal Son of God Incarnate, should

honour

honour and dignify this ſecond Temple by his being preſented there, by his frequent acceſs unto it, by his corporal preſence, and by his teaching in it. Hereby was made a far greater acceſſion of glory to that Temple, than all *Solomon*'s Gold and Silver, Riches and Magnificence could put upon the former Temple.

Now whereas God in effect promiſed, that what was wanting as to external glory in the ſecond Temple, ſhould be made up with advantage in ſpiritual glory; we may hence obſerve,

That ſpiritual glory is the chief glory; and where this is, it abundantly makes up and ſupplies the defects of other glory. This is a truth, the conſideration whereof is not unſeaſonable at preſent. We have here a fine and beautiful Church which draws many eyes upon it; and if there be nothing indecently pompous or gaudy in it, I would hope the beauty of a Church would be an eye-ſore to no man. If we adorn our own Houſes without offence, why ſhould not ſome Ornament be allowed the Houſe of God, provided that ſuch moderation and decency be therein obſerved, as becomes a place dedicated to the Service of God.

Beſides, I know not but the decent,

chaſte, and modeſt Ornature of a place in which God is to be worſhipped, may be a means of drawing ſome people thither who would not much care to aſſemble themſelves in an undecent and ſordid place.

Aſpicis ut veniant ad candida tecta columbæ,
Accipiet nullas ſordida turris aves.

But yet however, we muſt take heed that we place not too much in theſe external things; that we pleaſe not our ſelves too much in them. When all is done, Spiritual Ornaments are the only Ornaments, and Spiritual Glory the true Glory: If that be wanting to this place, all other glory will ſignify little. Sin marrs the beauty, and ſtains the glory of any place or people. Sound Doctrine, pure Ordinances, ſpiritual Worſhip, the holineſs and unblameableneſs of our Lives, the converſion of Sinners, the turning of many to righteouſneſs; theſe are the things that will more beautify and adorn this place, that will reflect more true and ſubſtantial Glory on it, than all the Coſt and Art that hath been expended and laid out upon it to adorn and beautify it.

Theſe are the things that would make *the glory of this latter houſe greater than the glory of the former.*

FINIS.